

SACRED
FICTIONS

HOLY WOMEN AND
HAGIOGRAPHY IN
LATE ANTIQUITY

LYNDA L. COON

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Sacred Fictions

Holy Women and Hagiography
in Late Antiquity

Lynda L. Coon

PENN

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IN MEMORY OF
NELSON B. COON AND
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Introduction

At first Zosimas was troubled, thinking that he saw the appearance of the devil and he trembled. But he protected himself with the sign of the cross, and he saw that there really was some kind of being walking along at mid-day. It was a woman and she was naked . . . her body black as if scorched by the fierce heat of the sun, her hair was white as wool and short, coming only to the neck.¹

IN THE EARLY SEVENTH-CENTURY LIFE of the harlot-saint Mary of Egypt, the holy woman first appears to a virginal priest, Zosimas, as a demonized apparition floating along the banks of the Jordan River. At the same time, her extraordinary physical appearance resembles that of the Son of Man from Revelation (1.14), “his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow.”² She is also the bride from the Song of Songs (1.5–6): “I am swarthy but beautiful, . . . Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has blackened me.”³ This hagiographical text illustrates the paradoxical nature of late antique biographies of Christian holy women. The Egyptian Mary, in her sacred biography, is a hideous wraith and, at the same time, the eschatological Messiah; her body is repulsive yet she is the bride of Christ; she is a vessel of sin as well as a vessel of repentance; she describes herself as the disciple of the devil, but she subsequently becomes the spiritual mentor of a male altar servant. She is the physical embodiment of feminine self-indulgence and, conversely, the personification of Christian self-mortification.

Mary’s holy life (*vita*) is entirely fabricated from paradox and inversion; although she becomes an exemplary holy woman, the first half of her symbolic life replicates Eve’s expulsion from paradise. The defiled Mary engages in sexual acts not for payment but for pleasure. She explains to her chaste confessor, Zosimas, that “all unnatural acts were natural for her.” The whore-Mary corrupts Christian pilgrims and inverts the apostolic mission; as the ex-harlot reveals to Zosimas, she used to “hunt for the souls of young men.” Mary’s *vita* parodies the pious lives of more conventional late antique female saints who engage in extraordinary acts of philanthropy,

remove their bodies from the marriage market, and travel independently about the Mediterranean and Holy Land. The harlot-saint's independence stems not from pious continence but from her depraved sexuality. Her philanthropy and charity take the form of the free bestowal of her body on Christian pilgrims; she finances a pilgrimage to the Holy Land by offering her flesh as payment for the voyage. Through her conversion to the radical life of self-renunciation, however, Mary refashions her debauched body into a vehicle of grace.

Grotesque asceticism and heroic compunction transform Mary's sacred image from that of the postlapsarian Eve into the inviolable Virgin Mary, for intense abstinence makes the holy woman's body impenetrable. The Egyptian Mary's sun-scorched skin, woolly-white hair, and naked body are physical prooftexts that the ex-harlot has recaptured the status before sin (*status ante peccatum*). The Jordan River Valley, in Mary's *vita*, is the earthly counterpart of heavenly paradise where human beings—even the most debased sinners—can achieve a celestial perfection. The saint-Mary lives in this hallowed valley as a spiritual being who symbolically baptizes herself in the Jordan River and receives no instruction or communion from the priestly hierarchy until just before her death. She walks on water, levitates, travels at supernatural speed, possesses the power of prophetic clairvoyance, and survives for forty-seven years consuming only three loaves of bread for nourishment. Mary's symbolic life castigates the works-righteousness of Zosimas, who submits to her spiritual authority, dramatically reversing the gender relations of late antiquity. The *vita* of this harlot-saint thus confronts the historian of gender and Christianity with a provocative question: how can texts that contain such stereotypical images of female depravity simultaneously empower corrupt females to such a great extent that they overwhelm spiritual men?

This work approaches the study of late antique and early medieval hagiography, or saints' lives (c. 400–700 CE), from a theological perspective by demonstrating how very different hagiographers from disparate cultures exploited biblical rhetoric both to empower and bridle sacred portraits of women.⁴ It examines the three major patterns of female sanctity which range in locus from East to West, in time from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages, and in model from independent desert hermit to cloistered ascetic. The book describes the influence of the institutionalization of the male priesthood and the masculinization of the altar space on subsequent depictions of holy women and men. It compares women's *vitae* within the context of corresponding male models of sanctity and shows how rhetori-

cal uses of male and female clothing in hagiographical texts delineate the distinctive theological roles of both sexes.⁵

The book focuses on eight sacred fictions of women from the Holy Land, the late antique Roman Mediterranean, and Frankish Gaul. The lives of the fifth-century legendary saints Pelagia of Antioch and Mary of Egypt were enormously popular throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The textual depictions of these two harlot-saints mirror the biblical motif of defiled woman as instrument of salvation.⁶ The *vitae* of three influential Roman women—the Augusta Helena (c. 255–329), Jerome’s life of the widow Paula (c. 347–404), and the fifth-century sacred biography of Melania the Younger (c. 383–439)—transform the image of the late Roman aristocracy into a charitable, humble, and humanitarian regime that adheres to Christ’s precepts.⁷ These three lives perform the feminine function of civilizing and humanizing the militant, apocalyptic Christianity of the late Roman Empire.⁸ The sixth- and seventh-century Frankish hagiographies of Monegund, Radegund, and Balthild demonstrate the depiction of holy women as civilizing forces in another turbulent era of western history, early medieval Gaul. This shift in geographical focus is essential because of the enormous influence of the *vitae* of the Romans Helena, Paula, and Melania on Merovingian portraits of phenomenal women.⁹ The critical salvific directive of all eight lives is the transformation of female flesh from sin to redemption in imitation of the metamorphosis of fallen Eve into the Virgin Mary.

The title, *Sacred Fictions*, expresses the basis of this study—hagiographical motifs driven not by historical fact but by biblical *topoi*, literary invention, and moral imperative. Historians recently have exploited saints’ lives for what they reveal about the social, political, and spiritual cultures that produced them. In contrast, the emphasis of this work is *not* on the historical lives of the subject saints but on the theological and didactic agendas of their authors. Clearly some of these *vitae* have more basis in historical fact than others. For example, the lives of Melania the Younger and Paula are relatively well documented. Melania’s priest and fellow pilgrim, Gerontius, composed her sacred biography. Gerontius’s account is replete with historical detail; however, the priest also creates a “sacred fiction” of his female patron by patently assimilating Melania to the biblical image of the charitable matron. Not all “sacred fictions” are presented in the form of *vitae*. Paula’s “life” is actually a late antique *epitaphium*; it is a letter of praise (*laudatio*) written by Paula’s friend, the biblical exegete Jerome, and addressed to her daughter, Eustochium. The *epitaphium* de-

tails Paula's pious deeds and saintly death; but it also goes beyond chronicling in that Jerome refashions Paula's laudable life to conform to biblical models of feminine piety. Other kinds of religious texts, such as liturgical calendars, martyrologies, and liturgies commemorating saints' feasts, often contain such spiritual inventions.¹⁰ "Sacred fictions" also can include collections of numinous narratives, such as those allegorical texts which comprise the Helena legend.¹¹ Of the three late Roman patrician lives studied here, Helena's is clearly the most fictional. The late antique churchmen who constructed Helena's holy image counterbalanced the warlike Christianity of her son, Constantine, by highlighting the philanthropic deeds of his elderly mother. Allegorically, Constantine and Helena became the new Christ and Mary of a resurrected Christian empire.

The lives of the Merovingian saints examined here were written by friends and disciples of the subjects or by hagiographers who desired to foster their cults. By fusing biblical and native Germanic traditions, the culture of Merovingian Gaul put a unique twist on these *vitae*. For example, Radegund's male hagiographer, Bishop Fortunatus, portrays her as a Merovingian martyr who crucifies her flesh in imitation of Christ's passion. Fortunatus also punctuates his text with a distinctive Germanic flavor. Radegund tends the hearth, carries firewood, mixes drinks with her own hands, and hosts folkloric banquets where she ministers to the poor and diseased. The bishop also recounts in detail Radegund's rejection of the characteristic clothing and diet of the Frankish nobility. Despite the Germanic imagery, Merovingian *vitae*, like their desert and Roman counterparts, use biblical rhetoric to demonstrate how fallen female bodies can transmute into mediators of salvation.

Unlike the *vitae* of Radegund, Melania, and Paula, which can be documented by other sources, the representations of Pelagia and Mary are mythological and fabricated from biblical rhetoric, apocryphal lives of Mary Magdalene, and the lives of other desert hermits. Clearly the cultures that produced the holy biographies of Mary of Egypt and Radegund of Poitiers are disparate, and, as Julia Smith has pointed out, the eastern model of the penitent prostitute had little influence on representations of Merovingian female saints.¹² Although the construction and reception of the images of the eastern and western holy women studied here are not the same, they are comparable because their creators used biblical rhetoric to demonstrate how women who convert to the life of radical self-abnegation become instruments of salvation for men. This book is about the use of biblical discourse by authors from very different cultures and historical eras for this corresponding purpose.

Both Hebrew and Christian scripture use images of defiled women to depict the chasm between humans and God, and the Christian gospels proclaim the hope of universal redemption through Christ's healing and converting of female sinners. Christian hagiographers, including the author of the *vita* of Mary of Egypt, similarly exploit biblical conversion rhetoric to affirm the possibility of universal salvation. The message of such texts is simple: if daughters of Eve can remake their bodies into spiritual vessels, so too can all other sinners.¹³ The most enduring paradigms for early women's sanctity—the repentant hermit, the late Roman patrician philanthropist, and the early medieval Frankish cloistered nun—are built on a series of unconventional images of women. Hagiographers make their dynamic women saints walk on water, mystically consecrate the eucharist, and engage in death-defying acts of self-mortification.

The same hagiographers, however, counteract these unorthodox representations of women's power by including spiritual motifs that invariably domesticate female authority. Women's hagiography teaches that the daughters of Eve must make their bodies impenetrable through militant chastity, self-entombment, spiritual exile, or institutionalized claustration. Repentant women must adhere to Pauline strictures concerning their status in the public church, and they must eradicate feminine self-indulgence through ascetic attire and philanthropy. Finally, the spiritual powers (*charismata*) of cloistered nuns must operate within a feminized, domestic environment. Female saints clean altars, catch demons with their spindles, and miraculously perform domestic chores. They atone for Eve's fall by enclosing their bodies in tiny cells, coffins, and tombs. An enshrined, penitential woman who atones for the sorrowful life of the postlapsarian Eve is a salvific instrument in Christian history.

The hagiography of female saints replicates the process of redemption. By transforming profane female flesh into a vehicle of grace, women's conversion extends the hope of universal salvation to sinful humanity. Dynamic male saints act out the linear progression toward salvation through a series of exemplary deeds. Late antique and early medieval Christians interpreted Christ's crucifixion as a kind of exorcism, initiating the expulsion of evil from the world. The great Egyptian male hermits thus reproduce the redemptive powers of the crucifixion by exorcizing legions of demons who take the shapes of beasts, serpents, reptiles, crocodiles, bishops, and seductive women. For the male hermits, evil is an external force that must be eliminated from the world. Female ascetics, however, immure themselves in claustrophobic cells, expiate their sins, and place themselves under the mentorship of male teachers. For women ascetics, the battle

against evil is generally internal, a struggle against the female nature itself. While the holy man ventures into the world or the wilderness to battle heroically against evil, the holy woman turns inward to heal the fissures of a corrupted self. The *vita* of a holy man records the transformation of male flesh from dust to spirit, from Old Adam to New Adam or Christ (1 Corinthians 15.45–47; Genesis 2.7). Female *vitae* describe how exceptional holy women remake the fallen body of Eve into the body of the “New Eve” or the impenetrable Virgin Mary. Biblical discourse endowed hagiographical *vitae* with the male prototype of the “New Adam/Christ” and the corresponding female model of the “New Eve/Mary.”

Paradox, inversion, reversal, transformation, and rebirth are all essential components of sacred discourse. Masculine and feminine spirituality both appropriate traditional constructions of male and female behavior and invert them to instruct human audiences that the sacred operates in a manner antithetical to profane convention. Medieval theologians manipulated the paradoxical nature of sacred gender. Early theologians interpreted the crucifixion as an exorcism, while later biblical exegetes understood it as a childbirth.¹⁴ The wound in Christ’s side gives birth to the church (*ecclesia*), just as Adam gave birth to Eve from his side. Medieval depictions of Christ crucified compare the bleeding Messiah with lactating females who nourish infants. Christ feeds Christians with the blood that pours through the wound in his side, his own flesh performing the female function of providing food and nurturing new life.¹⁵ Through similar paradoxical imagery, the Virgin Mary functions as a Christian priest because she first consecrated Christ (the eucharist) in her womb. She is also the Christian altar, for her lap displays the baby Jesus just as the sacrificial table exhibits the eucharist. The enclosed space of the Virgin’s body functions as a receptacle of grace, and medieval “opening-virgins” (*vièrges-ouvrantes*) portray Mary’s womb as sheltering the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The enigmatic nature of sacred gender runs counter to the frequent assumption of modern scholarship that early societies operated under rigidly polarized masculine/feminine categories: “intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgment/mercy, and order/disorder.”¹⁶ Church writers, however, blended both masculine and feminine characteristics not only in the *vita Christi* but also in the sacred lives of holy women and men in order to demonstrate the otherworldly nature of Christian sanctity.

The lives of late antique and early medieval holy women (and men) also contain instances of spiritual cross-genderings. Holy women are both

masculine (spirit) and feminine (flesh), and their sacred biographies both empower and restrain their spiritual activities. Averil Cameron has argued that early Christian writings couple outspoken misogyny with a kind of early Christian feminism.¹⁷ Dyan Elliott has noted that in the lives of pious women "submission inevitably overshadows subversion in the hands of a skilled narrator."¹⁸

Feminist theologians, historians, and literary critics of the past two decades applied contrasting hermeneutic approaches to the existence of both misogyny and feminism in the same text. In the 1970s radical feminist theologians concentrated on the misogynous motifs of Christian discourse, denouncing the scriptural representation of God the Father as a phallic conspiracy.¹⁹ In the 1980s, more moderate feminist interpreters of the Bible reacted against the polemical exegesis of the previous decade by recovering the "secret history" of early Christian women's authority, independence, mobility, prophetic power, and charismatic potency.²⁰ The rediscovery of the antique women's *ecclesia*, they maintained, provided a vital model for contemporary Christian feminists who did not want to reject the church as a misogynistic, patriarchal community.²¹

Church historians and hagiologists who subscribe to this "hermeneutics of remembrance" have proclaimed that holy women experienced a gender revolution in late antiquity. In her 1991 work on early women saints, Joyce Salisbury championed the late antique gender revolution by featuring holy women's "freedom from social expectations," "freedom of thought," "freedom of movement," and "freedom from gender identification."²² Salisbury identified such activities as living or traveling independently and rejecting marriage to practice celibacy as demonstrations that holy women wielded power and autonomy that went well beyond the norm for late antique and early medieval women. There is little question that most *vitae* of holy women contain the textual cross-genderings emphasized by Salisbury. But she reached her conclusions by considering only the feminist rhetoric of women's hagiography and downplayed its misogynist counterpart.

Both the radical feminist hermeneutic of the 1970s and its theoretical antithesis, the "hermeneutic of remembrance," focus on only half of the paradoxical treatment of women in sacred discourse. Because hagiographical texts duplicate biblical motifs, women's *vitae* reproduce the enigmatic portrayal of women in scripture. Late antique and early medieval saints' lives suggest that women's piety and depravity are codependent and that male altar servants alone possess the power to exorcize feminine corruption

and reunite women with God. Even in the iconoclastic *Life of Mary of Egypt*, an apparently independent figure confronts a hierarchical patron, kneels pliantly before him, and accepts communion. Women's *vitae* need to be reexamined with an eye toward the highly rhetorical and symbolic meanings contained in their sacred biographies.

Very recent work on women and early Christianity has been influenced by post-structuralist interpretations of the social and cultural construction of gender, sexuality, and the body.²³ Historians focusing on these constructions examine the fluidity of gender models and the means by which various historical cultures recreate the categories of "masculine" and "feminine" in order to accommodate changing social, political, economic, and spiritual precepts. This methodology also considers more fully the relationship between author and text and between sacred image and didactic purpose.²⁴ Male writers who constructed the symbolic images of holy women did so not only to glorify the piety of female saints but also to suppress the vacillating faith of men and to feature powerful, independent holy women's submission to the male hierarchy.

Kate Cooper suggests that late antique women's lives should be reinterpreted in terms of the messages they direct to Christian men since "both speaker and audience were generically understood as masculine." Late antique *vitae* did not "straightforwardly represent flesh-and-blood women themselves," according to Cooper, but "rather served to symbolize aspects of the tension to be found among men."²⁵ Christian writers wrote for a "masculine" audience, and female saints' lives can be used only circumspectly to document the actual condition of late antique and early medieval Christian holy women. The *Life of Mary of Egypt*, for example, is not really about Mary: the *vita* elucidates "the tension to be found among men"²⁶ because the male compiler of this mythological life used the heroic conversion of an illiterate, sinful woman to castigate the spiritual pride of a works-righteous male priest. In so doing, the hagiographer employed a rhetorical technique drawn from the Christian gospels.

The evangelists often contrast the rational intellect of the male apostles with the emotional and simple minds of women. Faithful women believe in Christ without hesitation whereas the male apostles doubt, demand "signs and wonders," and cling to earthly things. Christ (Matthew 16.22–23) vents his wrath at the apostle Peter, who is not able to comprehend the spiritual significance of the future passion: "And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This [the crucifixion] shall never happen to you.' But he [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me,

Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.’” In the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, Mary functions as the converted woman whose simple faith is pure and spontaneous. Her confessor, Zosimas, personifies the doubting apostle who clings to the rational intellect and to “human things.”

Although Mary’s sacred biography is a highly mythological one, other women’s lives—even those with corroborating historical sources—contain similar *topoi* of female depravity and piety. In short, all saints’ lives are rhetorical, didactic, and constructed. They are sacred fictions, not factual accounts of human achievements. The lives of the legendary Pelagia and Mary, as well as the better-documented biographies of Melania the Younger and Paula, overstep traditional gender boundaries and conform to more conservative portraits of ancient women. These texts allow the historian to reconstruct the perspective of the male authors rather than the historical reality of the women whose stories are recounted.

Radical portrayals of female saints are those in which holy women follow the charismatic models of Hebrew and Christian holy men, such as Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles. Although the Hebrew and Christian Bibles provide brief references to female judges and prophets, there are no biblical women whose deeds can compare with the miraculous accomplishments of these charismatic men. In fact, the prophet Ezekiel condemns female prophets who make magic veils and wrist bands and who “hunt for human souls” (Ezekiel 13.17–18). In the ancient world, men possessed public authority: “They were astounded at his [Christ’s] teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority” (Mark 1.22). In Christian discourse, manhood defined miraculous power, consecrated authority, and spiritual perfection: “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles” (Ephesians 4.13–14). Christian scripture provides the antithesis of the “manhood of Christ”: “Weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3.6–7). Christian hagiographers based authoritative images of both male and female holiness on the “mature manhood of the Son of God.” Ascetic practices assimilate the female body to that of Christ crucified, so that holy women literally become Christ and perform his salvific miracles. Powerful women, therefore, are like powerful men. Although

modern readers may be offended by spiritual perfection being defined by manhood, it must be recognized that late antique and early medieval audiences apparently could celebrate female holiness only in terms of a resolutely patriarchal standard.²⁷

Conservative or traditional depictions of holy women emphasize the unique spiritual attributes of female sanctity as derived from biblical (and even classical) depictions of women—domesticity, submission to male authority, and the codependency of women's depravity and piety. Only female *vitae* highlight these particular scriptural components of human spirituality. For example, the sixth-century hagiographer of the Frankish queen, Radegund of Poitiers, depicts the austere nun as meticulously cleaning house—an unthinkable activity for most male saints.

The major patterns for the literary representation of female sanctity duplicate the biblical motif of converted female as instrument of salvation. The three distinct models of female sanctity—the legendary harlot-saint, the patrician philanthropist, and the cloistered nun—are the textual offspring of the paradoxical biblical presentations of women. Scriptural women typically function either as the human embodiment of apostasy from God or as the passive recipients of divine power and grace. The Hebrew Bible (Ecclesiastes 7.26) personifies the rift between humans and God as a menacing female: “And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.” The Christian book of Revelation (17.3–6) embodies Roman depravity by describing the physical appearance of a besotted harlot, who is “arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication. . . . And [she was] drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” Yet the gospels repeatedly recount Christ's healings of idolatrous, depraved, and defiled women—all of whom are earthly manifestations of Revelation's sordid whore.

In the gospels (Matthew 26.6–13; Mark 14.3–9; Luke 7.36–50; John 12.1–8), a woman anoints Jesus and washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair.²⁸ In response to this great demonstration of faith, Jesus pronounces that “wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Matthew 26.13). The gospel of Luke identifies the woman with the “alabaster jar of ointment” as a “woman of the city, who was a sinner” (7.37). Christ announces the

universality of the redemptive process by instructing the male apostles to preach the gospels and immortalize the prophetic action of the anointing woman. The biblical construct of repentant woman as symbolic of pristine faith, however, relies on the fundamental correlation between female depravity and redemption, an antithetical alliance that hagiographers reproduce in the sacred fictions of even the most devout holy women. The essential didactic message of the various hagiographical *vitae* examined in this book is that all women—even holy women—must continually combat the female self that is inherently alienated from God.

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Hagiography and Sacred Models

HAGIOGRAPHY IS AN EXALTED DISCOURSE that has formulated the literary representation of saints in popular and elite imagination during the two millennia of Christian history.¹ The often allegorical lives (*vitae*) of the saints were recited by priests during mass,² read by literate audiences, and depicted in art for illiterate Christians. The *vitae* of Christian holy women and men served the important function of reminding medieval Christians of their otherworldly citizenship and anticipated celestial residence. Saints, as superhuman mortals, were venerated locally or even universally as martyrs, confessors,³ ascetics, pastoral administrators, and cloistered servants of God. While ordinary Christians were God's foster children, the saints were the Creator's special friends.⁴ Hagiographers recorded the manifestations of the Holy Spirit to these friends of God who acted as intermediaries between the divine and the temporary.⁵ The ability of the saints to exist simultaneously in both worlds empowered them to work miracles and to serve as arbitrators for Christian communities in imitation of their biblical predecessors. As the heroic protagonists of hagiographical narratives, saints performed the symbolic function of acting out the sublime ideals of the faith as set forth in the biblical presentation of Hebrew and Christian holy men and women.⁶

The biblical lives of Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles form the charismatic prototypes for the sacred biographies of Christian saints. Elijah and Elisha, who hold "the word of the Lord" (1 Kings 17.24) in their mouths, function as intermediaries between God and humans. As such, the prophets accomplish a variety of miraculous deeds on behalf of humankind. The two holy men resurrect the dead: "Then Elijah stretched himself upon the child three times. . . . And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived" (1 Kings 17.21–22). Elijah multiplies both meal and oil for an impoverished widow during a terrible famine: "For thus says

the Lord the God of Israel, the jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 17.14). Elisha miraculously traverses the Jordan River: "The water was parted to the one side and to the other; and Elisha went over" (2 Kings 2.14). The terrifying Elijah slays the prophets of Ba'al: "And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there" (1 Kings 18.40). Angels and ravens nourish the undomesticated Elijah and Elisha, who dwell under trees, in caves, and on the tops of hills and who wear hairy mantles and leather girdles. "[Elijah] wore a garment of haircloth with a girdle of leather about his loins" (2 Kings 1.8).

Christ and John the Baptist similarly find the source of their charismatic authority in the wilderness. John the Baptist "was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1.6). In the desert, Christ "was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him" (Mark 1.13). When the Son of God emerged from the desert, he possessed the mysterious *charismata* of the Hebrew prophets. After Christ's death and resurrection, the human apostles continued his marvelous deeds and active ministry. The heirs to the prophetic, charismatic, and apostolic missions of biblical holy men are the saints who recreate the celestial feats of Elijah, Elisha, and Christ for diverse audiences of far-flung gentiles. Saints' lives served as the medium through which Christian writers chronicled the post-biblical intervention of the divine in human affairs.

The Origins of Christian Sanctity

Most world religions venerate the hallowed lives of extraordinary women and men who live in close proximity to the divine.⁷ Sacred biography is not an exclusively Christian genre, for classical antiquity and Hebrew writings similarly produced the miraculous *vitae* of holy mortals.⁸ The classical Greek *hagios* or Latin *sanctus* ("holy one") refers to a "quality possessed by things or persons that could approach divinity."⁹ The Septuagint, or Greek translation of the books of the Hebrew Bible and apocrypha, uses *hagios* to describe the celestial nature of the angels (Job 5.1; Tobit 11.14, 12.15; Zechariah 14.5; Psalm 89.6; Enoch 1.9). Both the Septuagint and Christian scripture characterize the prophets as *hagioi* (Wisdom 11.1; Luke 1.70; Acts 3.21); and the gospel of Mark (6.20) portrays John the Baptist as "righteous and holy" (*dikaion kai hágion*). In the gospels of Mark (1.24) and Luke (4.34), a demoniac acknowledges that Jesus of Nazareth is the

“holy one of God” (*ho hágios tou theou*); and, in John (6.69), Simon Peter recognizes Jesus as the “*hágios tou theou*.” Sacred discourse terms the Israelite tribes holy because they share an intimate, if not tempestuous, relationship with their Creator. The Hebrew Bible also designates assemblies of humans who have been called together by God as holy (Exodus 12.16; Numbers 16.3; 28.18ff), while Acts (9.13) names the Christian community in Jerusalem as the holy ones of God. The Pauline epistles generally use *hagioi*, which is often translated as “saints,” to identify those humans who belong to the Christian community or *ecclesia*. The apostle Paul provides a more specific definition of “saint” in Romans (12.1), where he equates *hágios* with a consecrated state: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Thus a saint is an individual who has attained a state of spiritual and bodily purity.

Sacred discourse not only applies *hágios* to celestial beings and humans, it also identifies certain geographic locations, architectural structures, and objects as holy. In Exodus (3.5; see also Acts 7.35), God cautions Moses: “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Other mountains, hilltops, and even cities function as “holy ground.” The prophet Nehemiah (11.1, 11.18) refers to Jerusalem as the “holy city,” as does the evangelist Matthew (4.5). In the Hebrew Bible, holy ground possesses the power to sanctify material culture, such as tabernacles, incense, priestly garments, and the flesh of sacrificial animals. In Acts (19.11–12), Paul’s handkerchiefs heal the sick and exorcize demoniacs. Scripture therefore applies the term *hágios* to immortals, mortals, places, edifices, and objects, all of which are consecrated by their proximity to the divine. Hagiographers, however, would transform the definition of human *hagioi* during the first centuries of Christian history.

Although the Pauline epistles most often depict the universal community of believers as “saints” (*hagioi*, *sancti*), one epistle, Hebrews (7.26), characterizes the holiness of Jesus as “blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.” Gradually, the extra-biblical definition of sanctity ceased to embrace the universal *ecclesia* and instead came to signify only those “unstained” mortals who had immediate access to divine power through their physical and spiritual imitation of Christ. The earliest humans to be venerated as superhuman Christians were the martyrs or “witnesses” of the faith. The literary prototype is provided in Acts, where a certain Stephen, “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6.5), who

“did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6.8), undergoes an arrest, trial, and execution that parallels Christ’s own passion. During his trial, Stephen receives ecstatic visions and exonerates his tormenters: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7.60). Stephen’s sacrifice of his own life emulates Christ’s death on the cross and the ensuing divine forgiveness of human sin. The biblical protomartyr’s successors, the North African, Syrian, Greek, and Roman martyrs, comprise a special category of sanctity because they reenact Christ’s torment and death. In return, God endows their bodies with salvific powers, for before their executions they received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including miracle working, celestial visions, prophecy, and absolution.

The lives of the martyrs, however, constitute an “unrealizable imperative” for ordinary Christians who could not bear the imitation of Christ’s crucifixion.¹⁰ After the age of the persecutions ended in the early fourth century and the church emerged as a legitimate institution, Christian sanctity focused more on holy endurance than on sacrificial death. Late antique sacred biographers concentrated on the asceticism, pastoral activity, and miracles of holy women and men.¹¹ If the martyrs were God’s exceptional dead, then the saints were the Creator’s miraculous living.¹² Yet sanctity itself was not a very well-articulated phenomenon in the late antique and early medieval church. The ecclesiastical hierarchy at that time did not institutionalize the process of making saints, and there were only sporadic attempts to systematize the cults of holy women and men.¹³ Canonization as a formal, ecclesiastical process is the product of a thousand-year history of Christian sanctity.¹⁴

A contemporary author has asked, “Is Mother Teresa a saint?” Although millions venerate her as a “living saint” who ministers to the wretched and outcast, she is not. In order for her to become an official saint in the Roman Catholic Church, a papal commission would have to validate the orthodoxy of her writings and would have to call witnesses to attest to her righteous life and post-mortem miracles. Only after this elaborate legal process would Mother Teresa be declared a saint. In the twentieth century, the pope is the exclusive arbitrator of Roman Catholic sanctity. The papacy, however, did not begin to expand its authority over the process of saint-making until the late tenth century, and, even then, local veneration and not papal sanction continued to establish cults of the holy dead. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century papacy proclaimed that the pope alone had the power to make saints, and in the late Middle Ages canonization developed into a legalistic and bureaucratic procedure. The late antique and

early medieval church, however, did not rely on such papal machinery. The sacred biographies of Christ-like humans sparked the popular cultic veneration of anchorites, priests, and pastoral bishops; written texts expedited the “canonization” of early saints and immortalized their local cults.¹⁵

Hagiographers and Medieval Audiences

The scholarly study of hagiography has had a conflicted history. Eighteenth-century intellectuals, such as David Hume and Edward Gibbon, condemned saints’ lives to the murky world of popular polytheism and credulity.¹⁶ The Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment scholarly neglect of and contempt for saintly biography resulted from a tenacious belief in historical “objectivity” and the ability to recover the authentic past as well as an anti-ecclesiastical sentiment. Hagiographical discourse is notorious for its fallacious biographical details and fantastic phenomena and therefore did not appeal to Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers dedicated to rational inquiry into antiquity. In the past few decades, however, intellectual and cultural historians have transformed the study of saintly narrative by focusing not only on the scant biographical information that can be gleaned from a text but also on the cultural paradigms transmitted to medieval audiences through the symbolic lives of the saints. Since the 1930s, social and economic historians also have recognized the value of hagiography for the study of daily life, material culture, and even commerce.¹⁷ There now exists a multiplicity of approaches to the study of hagiography, ranging from concentration on political uses of saintly biography to the search for gendered meanings in these allegorical texts.¹⁸

Since the early 1980s, historians of the church and popular religion have reevaluated the relationship between the privileged, literate authors of sacred texts and their intended audiences, suggesting that the over-used categories of popular and elite religion were the creation not of ancient Christianity but of post-Enlightenment scholarship.¹⁹ Medieval Christians of all social classifications consumed saints’ lives in various forms, and therefore holy *vitae* were part of a universal Christian culture. Artistic, verbal, and written accounts of heroic humans who emulated the suffering of Job, the visions of Ezekiel, the ascension of Elijah, Jesus’ exorcism of the Magdalene, the raising of Lazarus, the passion of Christ, and the mourning of the Marys circumscribed the pious Christian. These earthly representations of divine truths were ubiquitous in the villages and urban centers of northern Europe and the Mediterranean.

Hagiologists and linguists have attempted to identify the early medieval lay audience of saints' lives and have tried to ascertain how well these congregations comprehended what they were hearing, seeing, or reading. One scholar of early medieval Latin has argued that Merovingian *vitae* were "used with direct pastoral objectives." Another has suggested that saints' lives were a major tool of edification in Merovingian Gaul.²⁰ Merovingian hagiographers themselves remark that they are aiming at illiterate audiences, and they note that their lives were read publicly during mass and on saints' feast-days. Sociolinguists have recognized that both the colloquial language and repetitious vocabulary (*audire, auditores, spectare, vulgo, plebs, populus, fideles, multi*) of Merovingian *vitae* suggest that these texts were aimed at a general public.²¹ By the ninth century, however, the intended audience for sacred biography increasingly was restricted to monastic houses. Theorists have explained the change from Merovingian "pastoral communication" to Carolingian "internal monastic use" by pointing to the ninth century's "clericalization" of Latin.²² Of course, all hagiographical narratives possess more than one specific public. For example, Venantius Fortunatus could have written the *Life of Radegund of Poitiers* with an eye toward the select group of nuns at Poitiers, but more than likely the bishop solicited a wider audience of holy women and men, and, perhaps, an even more expansive congregation of lay aristocratic women.²³

The work of linguists who focus on the intersection of oral and written culture has shed light on the reciprocal relationship between hagiographer and audience.²⁴ An individual hagiographer's successful promotion of a saint's cult depended on "the flexibility of a collective oral tradition."²⁵ By the sixth century, the Bible had become the normative text of European culture, and the majority of medieval Christians received instruction in the gospels through the medium of oral culture. Thus, medieval hagiographers could evoke an unspoken, extratextual dimension that would be understood by medieval audiences who were culturally versed both in scripture and in the lives of the saints. Linguists refer to this process as *metonymy*, or a "mode of signification wherein the part stands for the whole."²⁶ Biblical culture enabled medieval Christians to decode these symbolic narratives. For example, Fortunatus describes how the young Radegund engaged in sacred play: she organized her fellow toddlers into penitential processions and marched them into churches. Such images were evocative of a greater biblical context: the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2.41–52) and the young Samuel, putting on the Hebrew ephod and ministering as a boy-prophet (1 Samuel 2.18). Radegund, like Samuel, "grew in the pres-

ence of the Lord" (1 Samuel 2.21). Thus many of the textual clues that may be overlooked by modern audiences were undoubtedly recognized by medieval Christians, whose childhood instruction would have focused on the legendary feats of prophets, martyrs, and saints. So, the audience for medieval hagiography was not a blank tablet on which hagiographers' "representations of a story or person could impress themselves."²⁷ Public response to oral readings or visual depictions of saints' *vitae* constituted a crucial stage in the evolution of sacred biographies.

The multivalent uses of hagiographical discourse can be understood only by examining the spiritual and cultural environment of both hagiographers and their intended audiences. Sacred biography was an omnipresent literary genre in medieval Europe, and hagiographers wrote hundreds of *vitae* during the first seven centuries of Christian history. Male theologians, exegetes, and members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy composed the majority of early sacred biographies, although there have been several attempts to claim female authorship of important hagiographical accounts, such as the apocryphal acts of the apostles.²⁸ There were a handful of anonymous female hagiographers during the early medieval period, including the seventh-century Frankish nun Baudonivia who wrote the *vita* of the Frankish queen, Radegund of Poitiers, and is the only extant self-named woman hagiographer of the late antique and early medieval period.²⁹

The church fathers, or patristic authors, composed some of the most famous sacred fictions of the late antique period. Athanasius (c. 296–373), the theologian and bishop of Alexandria, wrote the archetypal desert ascetic *vita*, the life of the Egyptian hermit Abba Antony.³⁰ The bishop's narrative fashions the austere Antony as an Egyptian Christ, a prototypical desert anchorite, and a charismatic preacher against the Arian heresy in Egypt. Other patristic writers created sacred biographies of women and men to promote the virginal life among the Mediterranean elite in both Rome and Byzantium.³¹ The eastern fathers Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–389), Basil (c. 330–379), and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395) combined the simple beauty of Christian parable with the highly stylized rhetoric of late antiquity in *vitae* that immortalized the sanctity of their most intimate friends and family.³² Patristic hagiography served a variety of purposes, which included evoking the experience of desert asceticism, reinforcing theological orthodoxy, promoting virginity, and sanctifying members of patrician families who would then serve as models for worldly renunciation.

Church fathers devised the rhetorical framework from which later hagiographical models were derived. Erudite biographers such as Athanasius,

Jerome, Basil, and the two Gregories blended Christian conventions, pagan eulogies, and the lives of virtuous men of antiquity. Their *vitae* fused Hebrew, classical, and Christian formulaic patterns of behavior. The result is the invention of saints such as Jerome's Paul the First Hermit, whose charisma is Hebrew and whose knowledge is classical, or Sulpicius Severus's (c. 363–420) Martin of Tours, who is both a Roman soldier and an Elijah-like exorcist.³³ Texts written by the church fathers chronicle the triumph of Christian morality over classical *virtus*, of saints' lives over the lives of philosophers and Caesars. They underscore the victory of Christian biography over its classical counterpart, that is, the symbolic *vitae* of male intellectuals and politicians.

Sixth-century western hagiographers, inheriting many of these textual models, acknowledge the literary debt owed to the church fathers. Gregory of Tours in his *Glory of the Martyrs* asserts that Jerome was one of the two great doctors of the Merovingian church, second only to the apostle Paul.³⁴ There are, however, important rhetorical differences. Sixth-century hagiographical discourse is characterized by the ubiquitous intervention of God in the most mundane matters. Whereas patristic authors exploit Christian and classical rhetoric to endow their subject saints with Christian virtue and divinely given wisdom, early medieval hagiographers stress biblical miraculous texts in order to bestow on their saints the charismatic and miraculous powers of the Hebrew prophets and Christ.³⁵ Early medieval saints heal, curse, exorcize, raise the dead, walk on water, multiply food and drink, control nature, and live on earth as heavenly citizens through their *imitatio Christi*. In fact, the sixth century represents a turning point in the history of Christian discourse, for during that time scriptural models overpowered secular or classical ones.³⁶ The sixth-century East witnessed a massive increase in the number of Christian miraculous texts, saints' lives, relics, shrines, and images, with little room left for secular narrative.³⁷ The sixth-century proliferation of Hebrew- and Christian-influenced images, objects, and literary *topoi* in both the East and West presented Christian audiences with visible, tangible, and audible manifestations of divine power. In fact, the great majority of Christians probably received their training in saintly narrative through the vehicles of visual art and public readings of holy *vitae*.

Sacred biography thus communicated the *vita Christi* to antique and medieval Christians through both verbal and nonverbal means.³⁸ Monastic libraries housed collections of written saints' lives, and wealthy individuals apparently owned private devotional copies of popular texts. For example,

the court of the ninth-century Carolingian king, Charles the Bald, possessed a small volume of the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, and some laity probably owned manuscript copies such as the *vita* of the Egyptian Mary to use for devotional purposes.³⁹ Most devotees of the saints, however, had access to hallowed *vitae* through art and liturgical performance. The shrines and tombs of the holy dead contained numerous works of art depicting the miraculous deeds of the saints. Roman pontiffs and local bishops commissioned artists to embellish places of worship with lavish ornamentation, such as crucifixes, jeweled reliquaries, and images of saints and biblical figures. Relics and images of saints were also worn as protective palladiums or amulets.⁴⁰ Many of these objects themselves became focal points of veneration and pilgrimage, as did the material remains from saints' shrines and tombs, such as shrouds, dust, votive candles, and clothing.⁴¹ Representational art and material culture from the tombs of the holy dead consequently contributed to the discourse of the sacred.⁴²

In the highly ornate churches, shrines, and tombs of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, consecrated priests recounted the lives of famous holy women and men for illiterate Christian audiences. It is likely that saints' lives were dramatized by the clergy prior to the sacrificial climax of the mass. With exaggerated gestures, priests recited the holy biographies of the saints as part of a broad attempt to Christianize the northern kingdoms and to edify barbarians in the *imitatio Christi*.⁴³ Public ceremonies, rituals, images, and liturgical performances preached to Christian audiences the acceptance of social, religious, and political norms as illustrated through the lives of the saints. Sanctity was thus part of a universal yet diverse late antique and early medieval community.

Saints' *vitae* also served a variety of metaphorical, mimetic, and moralizing functions. Hagiography is a discourse that represents the deeds and values of holy persons so that a mundane audience can have access to their transcendent experience. Few worshipers responded to these numinous lives literally. Holy biographies induced a minority of Christians to act out the ascetic and miraculous deeds of God's saints. For most of Christendom, however, sacred lives represented good moral lessons but did not oblige ordinary mortals to mount pillars or inhabit caves to escape both family and worldly comfort.

The sacred biographies of the saints compelled the faithful to worship the omnipotence of God which manifested itself through the miraculous deeds of the saints. The word, both written and spoken, was the primary metaphor of Christianity because Christ, the Word (*logos*), had become

flesh (John 1.14).⁴⁴ Each word of holy scripture therefore represents the earthly manifestation of the heavenly *logos*. The public readings of scripture during mass were designed to illuminate divine truths for earthly congregations. The text of a saint's life, like a liturgical object or the eucharist, functioned as an earthly doorway to the divine because the reading, hearing, and seeing of these "moving icons" united the audience with God.⁴⁵ Because hagiographical texts expropriate the language, symbols, and literary commonplaces (*topoi*) of Christian scripture, the words of a saint's *vita* similarly function both as temporal revelations of divine truths and as liturgical aids to mystical meditation. Aside from serving the primary function of celebrating the Christ-like lives of the saints and the power of the *logos*, narrative *vitae* also chronicle the post-biblical intervention of the divine in human affairs. They thus demonstrate how humans can enact metaphorically the sublime precepts of the faith.

Hagiographers used the miraculous deeds and heroic virtues of holy women and men as cultural and religious symbols for eclectic audiences from Ireland to Syria. Saints' lives provided an ecumenical arena of discourse for a highly diverse Christendom, incorporating local (and relatively recent) heroes into an evocative biblical context. Thus Martin of Tours, who conversed with the departed, and Mary of Egypt, who miraculously levitated, recalled for audiences the revered stories of Saul speaking with the dead (1 Samuel 28.8–20) and of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14.25–26; Mark 6.48–50; John 6.19–20). Through these hagiographical performances, Christian saints promoted knowledge of the Bible in terms familiar to the audiences who heard or read their *vitae*. All saints' lives, whether mythical or historically based, provided widespread audiences with human examples of the imitation of Christ. Even the highly legendary and fantastic *Life of Mary of Egypt* became a popular paradigm for the process of converting sinners to the *imitatio Christi*.

The hagiographical recasting of the *vita Christi* not only exemplified the mysteries of the faith for audiences unfamiliar with Hebrew culture, it also enforced theological orthodoxy and institutional power. Through saints' lives, sacred biographers demarcated Christian asceticism, dogma, and miraculous power. Hagiographical images therefore operated as the popular manifestation of didactic power and, as such, they provided vital lessons of institutional authority and hierarchical control over most aspects of Christian spirituality. For example, sixth-century Gallo-Roman hagiographers argued for the superiority of corporate monasticism over solitary asceticism by employing the imperative power of holy *vitae* to discredit such independent action.

Western saintly discourse delineated the limits of Christian self-mortification precisely because the fourth- and fifth-century hagiographical construction of the Egyptian and Syrian desert hermit, whose motto was “no authority save God,” presented a dilemma to the developing organization of the church. The legends of powerful desert hermits challenged the authority of the ecclesiastical structure. Desert anchorites lived independently in caves and tombs, fought demons, overshadowed wealthy urban churchmen, and consecrated themselves through their asceticism. These icons of the faith possessed the charisms of healing and exorcizing—or the powers of inclusion and exclusion from the Christian community—without the sanction of the church hierarchy.⁴⁶ Indeed, fourth- and fifth-century desert chroniclers sometimes portrayed these charismatic hermits as outspoken censors of the episcopacy. Sixth-century writers, however, gradually softened the radical, extra-institutional images found in desert ascetic texts by creating new texts which placed such independent manifestations of spirituality under the control of the organized church. Saints’ lives served as the medium through which bishops promoted themselves as the arbiters of Christian spirituality.

Gallo-Roman churchmen championed a corporate model of asceticism over an individual one. The greatest danger facing superhuman desert ascetics, according to early medieval churchmen, was pride. Communal self-mortification and obedience to the episcopal hierarchy safeguarded the individual monk from pernicious fame. Institutional stability channeled the original fluid association of master hermit and disciple into highly disciplined monastic forms.

In his *Histories*, Bishop Gregory of Tours provides a glimpse of the Gallo-Roman transformation of the desert ideal into the western model of organized monasticism. Gregory reconstructs Merovingian sanctity through both popular legend and oral interview. In his *Decem libri historiarum*, the bishop of Tours recounts his own encounter with an unusual holy man, the deacon Vulfoliac, who lived in a monastery at Carignan in Gaul.⁴⁷ Gregory prompted the taciturn deacon to describe his failed emulation of the greatest of all Syrian ascetics, Symeon the Stylite or “pillar sitter” (c. 390–459).⁴⁸ The Syrian legend claims that Symeon chained himself to the top of a column in the desert in order to live both as Elijah on Mount Carmel and as the crucified Christ. Symeon’s pillar dwarfed the pagan temples that stood on nearby earthen mounds, and his column functioned as a kind of ladder of divine ascent. The Syrian holy man himself served as a mediator between heaven and earth. Vulfoliac, a Lombard expatriot in Gaul, professed that he had become so enamored of the power

of superhuman Christians such as Symeon that he aspired to live a life of exemplary austerity. He thus modeled himself on the Syrian stylite and reposed on a tower in Gaul during a winter that froze off his toenails.

The story, however, has an unusual ending. Vulfoliac's asceticism attracted the attention of local bishops, who came to inspect the peculiar ascetic and his pillar. Instead of congratulating the stylite on his perfect replication of the actions of eastern saints, the churchmen accused the holy man of spiritual presumption. They pointed out that the weather of Gaul was too harsh to permit ascetic modes that might be appropriate in desert climes. The bishops ordered Vulfoliac to dismount immediately, destroyed the pillar, and sent the holy man off to the nearest community of monks where Gregory later induced him to recite the events of his life. According to Gregory, the hapless saint remained embarrassed about his youthful excesses.

Gregory of Tours raises Vulfoliac to the superhuman status of Symeon Stylites and then knocks the Lombard pretender off his column to emphasize the subordination of independent asceticism to corporate monasticism and episcopal authority. Vulfoliac "was within an inch of being cast in with the wandering preachers, miracle workers, and other troublemakers who often ended their days rotting in episcopal prisons. He was saved by obedience."⁴⁹ Gregory's discourse on Vulfoliac illustrates the use of hagiographical narratives to modify previously established spiritual conventions. In the mini-*vita* of Saint Vulfoliac, Gregory of Tours asserts that bishops are the divinely ordained ministers of Gallo-Roman asceticism and monasticism, and that they alone are the custodians of divine power.

Hagiographical narratives also proclaimed the sacred mysteries of the mass, affirmed the power of those who consecrate the eucharist elements, and illustrated the proper veneration of holy persons, objects, and places. For example, an early medieval miraculous text, the *Mass of Saint Gregory*, describes how an unfaithful woman who had questioned the miracle of the mass became convinced of the magical transformation of bread and wine into body and blood when she beheld a bloody finger in the eucharist. This famous hagiographical narrative, duplicated in countless works of art, reinforced for medieval audiences the miracle of the mass and the power of the priests who perform it.⁵⁰

Early medieval *vitae* dictate proper reverence for the sacred. In imitation of Hebrew sacred discourse which teaches that proximity to the sacred consecrates both locations and objects, hagiographical texts acknowledge that the place and material culture connected with the life of a holy man or

woman must be revered by the faithful. Frankish saints blind, mutilate, and otherwise impair all violators of churches, tombs, shrines, vestments, devotional objects, and even the private living spaces of holy persons. Demons infiltrate the slothful bodies of nuns who forget to bless their food before eating it, and foul spirits haunt married women who engage in sexual activity during the sabbath.⁵¹ Abbesses and abbots punish debased nuns and monks who abandon their vows, and bishops castigate ascetics, like Vulfoliac, who fall into the sin of pride. The spiritual medicine of the saints who cure by means of the sign of the cross (*signum crucis*), prayer, and exorcism overpowers the feeble attempts at healing by pagan magicians. Holy men possess the power of unleashing souls from purgatory and releasing them into God's care.⁵² The saints themselves could return from the dead and request that prayers and ritual processions be held in their honor and that their bodily remains be housed in ornate reliquaries. Saints' *vitae* recount numerous examples wherein the holy dead punish slothful Christians who neglect their post-mortem cults and sacred remains. Sacred biographies thus served as coercive discourse and, as such, enjoined proper behavior—liturgical, social, medical, and even sexual.⁵³

The Christ Model

First and foremost, saints' lives commanded all Christians to emulate the exemplary life of Christ: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11.1). The primary model for constructing the lives of holy women and men is the evangelical life of Christ; however, the *imitatio Christi* offers the pious Christian a paradoxical model of behavior. The literary recreation of Christ's brief tenure on earth inverted ancient societal norms for the purpose of segregating the Son of God from ordinary patterns of human existence.⁵⁴ This kind of textual inversion is not unique to the Christian gospels, as the great Hebrew prophets, Elijah and Elisha, had similarly existed on the periphery of the human community. John the Baptist, the evangelical heir to the Hebrew prophets, wore camel's hair clothing and ate locusts; his ascetic clothing and diet connected him not with human society but with the animal world. Biblical prophets, who dwell in caves, on hilltops, and in the wilderness validate their affinity with heaven by rejecting such human conventions as family and community.⁵⁵

Christ shares the celibacy and poverty of the biblical prophets who lived in antithesis to ordinary mortals. The Son of God's charismatic powers of healing, resurrection, and control of nature attested to his descent

from Elijah and Elisha. The image of Christ as judge in the gospels confirmed his divinity within the context of the ancient eastern discourse on immortal adjudicators. As Hebrew prophet and exorcist, Christ conformed to the masculinized biblical model of the independent holy man as a masterful wonderworker.

The evangelical presentation of the *vita Christi*, however, also contains fluid gender images, thus harkening back to the Pentateuch which employs the feminine symbols of feeding and nurturing to describe Yahweh's love for the Israelites. Similarly, several of the pivotal metaphors of the Christian gospels rely on a profound feminization of Christ. Thus the *vita Christi* contradicted the traditional gender system of the antique Mediterranean. Participation in war and state service, and the siring of offspring had defined Greco-Roman masculinity. Roman men circulated in a sex-segregated official world where women were ritualistically excluded from the male spaces of government, such as the Curia.⁵⁶ Christ, however, displayed both masculine and feminine behavior within the context of a Judaic and Greco-Roman world that adhered to the ancient standard of sex segregation and gender distinction.

Christ's *vita* inverted the traditional gender order: he was apolitical, a pacifist, a nurturer of souls, a friend of women and lepers; his judgments were spiritual and otherworldly, not physical and political. Christ's celibacy proclaimed his prophetic status, while abrogating his virility in a world that honored sexual potency and fruitfulness in marriage. The constructed image of Jesus in the Christian gospels is paradoxical; he was the Son of God and Lord of Heaven, but his physiognomy was that of a simple pilgrim who was indistinguishable from the crowd of ordinary humans (Luke 24.13–35; John 20.15).

The most startling gender inversion in the gospels is that of the anointing of Christ (Matthew 26.6–13; Mark 14.3–9; Luke 7.36–50 and John 12.1–8). The greatest prophets such as Samuel (1 Samuel 10.1) and Nathan (1 Kings 1.34) had performed the symbolic action of anointing Hebrew kings. In Christian scripture, however, a woman ritually consecrates the Son of God, and in two of the synoptic gospels (Matthew 26.6; Mark 14.3) she performs this allegorical gesture in the house of a leper. The medieval exegesis of this event identified the woman with the “alabaster flask of ointment” as Mary Magdalene, a sinful woman (Luke 7.37) from whom Christ had expelled seven demons (Luke 8.2).⁵⁷ The metaphorical anointing of the prophet-Christ by a woman illustrates perfectly the evangelical technique of rhetorical inversion. In a society with strict regulations

against eating with the diseased or associating openly with women, a sinful woman anoints the Son of God in the house of a leper. The evangelical Jesus embraces the powerless: women, children, and the afflicted. In a manner of speaking, the *vita Christi* turns the world upside down, and, through this reversal of the traditional social, political, and gender order, Christ empowers the marginal sectors of Greco-Roman society. In the gospels, a “hierarchy of piety” supplants the existing social and economic order.⁵⁸ The earthly life of the Son of Man thus foreshadows the impending eschaton which will culminate in the destruction of human hierarchies and social stratification. Metaphorical inversions of the status quo are therefore earthly signs of Christ’s heavenly mission. Because hagiographical texts function as further revelation of the divine plan, saints’ *vitae* contain the same kinds of metaphorical inversions found in the *vita Christi*.

Christian hagiographers incorporated Christ’s rebellious, cross-gendering style in their lives of holy women and men. Female saints cut off their hair, dressed as men, traveled as apostles, preached, taught, walked on water, and defeated Satan in battle. Male saints fed and clothed the poor, multiplied food and drink, renounced physical weapons in favor of spiritual ones, and acted as spiritual mothers for Christians.⁵⁹ Because all hagiographical discourse contains an element of the Christological “world upside down” leitmotif, women, children, lepers, and the poor become central characters in sacred biography.

Sacred Models (1): The Adam and Eve of the Desert

The first major prototypes for Christian holiness—aside from the life of Jesus and the superhuman lives of the martyrs—are the *vitae* of desert hermits and recluses. Desert asceticism found its origins in third- and fourth-century Syria and Egypt. A series of fourth- and fifth-century writings record the momentous deeds and terse sayings (*apophthegmata*) of the great spiritual men and women of the desert.⁶⁰ These texts were incorporated into the institution of the western church through oral legends, private devotional copies, and monastic rules which required the public readings of desert *vitae* during the *lectio divina*.⁶¹ The intrepid piety, demonic warfare, and superhuman asceticism of the hermits who withdrew from the urban centers of the east to dwell in the wilderness, in imitation of Moses, Elijah, and Christ, became emblematic of the golden age of pristine austerity. Erudite hagiographers, including Athanasius of Alexandria, fashioned these charismatic hermits as second-covenant patriarchs who

verify the accuracy of Christian prophesy. Fourth- and fifth-century western chroniclers of Egyptian and Palestinian asceticism, such as Jerome, Rufinus, Egeria, Cassian, and Palladius, created the popular image of the desert as the Garden of Eden inhabited by Christian patriarchs and matriarchs whose rigorous asceticism had achieved for them a cherished prelapsarian status.⁶²

Paradox defines the prototypical male hermit or anchorite. The desert ascetic is an uneducated peasant whose divinely given wisdom rivals that of Greek philosophers (1 Corinthians 1.20); he is an unarmed warrior who defeats Satan's toadies with a spiritual weapon, the *signum crucis*. He is not consecrated through any symbolic ritual but is sanctified directly by God. His celibacy makes him spiritually fertile; his denial of the flesh results in superhuman strength; and his rejection of earthly food provokes angels to feed him (1 Kings 19.7). He is physically repulsive and "wild to look at, with unkempt hair, shriveled face, the limbs of his body reduced to a skeleton, dressed in some dirty rags sewn together with palm shoots."⁶³ Yet his physiognomy is also that of a man who has been highly cultivated through Christ. His terrifying countenance provides a vivid warrant for the apostle Paul's declaration that "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (1 Corinthians 1.28).

The Christian male anchorite thus is a being who exists on the periphery of human society and is "low and despised in the world." His habitat, diet, and appearance bind him to the domain of animals, for he is a scavenger living off wild roots and herbs. The intellectuals who compiled the mythological biographies and wise sayings of the desert hermits seized on the rhetoric of inversion to connect these new Christian heroes with such champions of the biblical past as the locust-eating John the Baptist or the hairy Elisha. The desert fathers continue Christ's warfare against evil, and their recorded lives promote these living icons of the faith as active agents in the salvation of humankind.

The primary charismatic power possessed by desert ascetics is that of exorcism, or the ability to drive out unclean spirits (*'akáthartoi*). In signaling the first step in the long process of expelling evil from the world, Christ's crucifixion itself functions as a kind of exorcism. The lives of desert saints mirror the sacrifice of God's Son in the service of defeating Satan. In fact, the *vitae* of prototypical desert ascetics, such as Athanasius's Abba Antony, mimic the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Antony crucifies himself through the intense mortification of his flesh

and immures himself in a tomb.⁶⁴ He engages in such fierce demonic combat that he collapses on the floor of the sepulcher. He finally emerges from the shrine with a new, spiritual body that is the physical manifestation of the apostle Paul's teaching: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15.44). Through Christian asceticism, the archetypal anchorite becomes the crucified and resurrected Christ. His new body mirrors that of the prelapsarian Adam: "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. . . . The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15.45–47; see Genesis 2.7). The hermit thus bears the likeness of "New Adam" or the image of the resurrected flesh. He has successfully liberated himself from the fruits of the fall—avarice, lust, greed, gluttony, and pride—and therefore is free to use his unearthly limbs to cleanse the world of demonic influence.

The sacred fiction of the male desert hermit thus centers on the militant powers of the crucifixion or the expulsion of evil from the world. The image of the female ascetic embraces the biblical archetype of masculine ascetic authority and shares many of the rhetorical motifs found in the lives of holy men. But whereas the *vitae* of male hermits exemplify the militancy of the cross, desert holy women's lives highlight the healing process of the crucifixion. The textual presentation of the conversion of men to the life of radical asceticism stresses the warfare against evil initiated by the crucifixion, whereas women's lives underscore the restorative powers of the cross.

The mythological image of the desert as a holy paradise where all humans would be emancipated from oppressive social and gender responsibilities attracted numerous women who dwelled in the tombs, cells, and communities of the wilderness.⁶⁵ The hagiographical depiction of female anchorites rivals the portrayal of the spiritual prowess of ascetic men. In the fifth-century Syrian corpus of desert texts, two holy women, Marana and Cyra, chastise their flesh to such an extent that their holy example frightens a male pilgrim who visits their cell. The two women "wear iron, and carry such a weight that Cyra, with her weaker body, is bent down to the ground and is quite unable to straighten her body. They wear mantles so big as to trail along behind and literally cover their feet and in front to fall down right to the belt, literally hiding at the same time face, neck, chest, and hands."⁶⁶ Other Syrian and Egyptian female anchorites crucify their flesh, scavenge food, walk on water, exorcize, arbitrate disputes, and teach men. The withered breasts, shriveled flesh, and sun-scorched faces of

these holy women demonstrate that an emaciated female body can be a Christ-like spiritual vessel.

Male hagiographers so successfully incorporate female hermits into the discourse of the desert that certain women appear in the texts as transvestites who masculinize their bodies through extreme mortification, wear men's clothing, and sometimes live in male monasteries. Not all desert holy women were so thoroughly subsumed by the masculine rhetoric of the desert, however. Although the titillating portraits of women who donned male clothing and lived as ascetic men have intrigued scholars for several decades, this mythological *topos* is not the predominant one for holy women.⁶⁷ There are very few extensive spiritual portraits of desert holy women, but the ones routinely recorded by desert chroniclers follow the prototype of the female recluse.

The hagiographical portrait of the female recluse, like its male counterpart, is built on a series of reversals. The inversions contained in women's *vitae*, however, illuminate the transformation from Eve to Mary. Because the ancient world associated females with bodily and spiritual sloth, the lives of holy women who could remake their bodies into immaculate vessels of faith dramatized the metamorphosis of the penetrated Eve into the impenetrable Virgin Mary.⁶⁸ In order to present this theological evolution, female desert *vitae* accentuate both unyielding enclosure and grotesque asceticism to confirm the evolution of holy women from bodily weakness to spiritual fortitude.

Desert women, according to hagiographical depictions, frequently entomb themselves in tiny cells which have no doors and usually only one window. The Syrian couple Cyra and Marana lived in such a heavily bulwarked space that it was possible to enter only by digging through the door.⁶⁹ According to these texts, women's power flows from such enclosed spaces; rarely do female hermits venture into the world to combat Satan's demonic hordes. Rather, most female recluses function as immovable receptacles of divine grace, not as active participants in the history of Christian salvation. The spiritual stratagem of self-immurement allows a holy woman to live as the bride of Christ who is, according to the Song of Songs (4.12), "a garden locked, a fountain sealed." She is the "New Eve" or the Virgin Mary, whose body served as a vessel of the Word. Through self-imprisonment, the desert recluse also removes her body from the sight of men and therefore works for male salvation, so often lost to the lures of feminine flesh. The fifth-century Syrian holy woman Domnina shuts herself in a hut in her mother's garden and there she makes herself invisible:

"[She is] literally covered up by her cloak and bent down onto her knees." Intense penance transforms Domnina's earthly body into a spiritual vessel: "Her skin is very thin, and covers her thin bones as if with a film, while her fat and flesh have been worn away by labors."⁷⁰ The symbolic description of Domnina's doubled-over body and withered flesh documents her successful atonement for Eve's sin. The Syrian recluse's tiny dwelling perfects her body by making it inaccessible even to the pilgrims and beggars who solicit her spiritual advice and alms.

Female desert *vitae*, such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus's brief account of Domnina, feature uncompromising enclosure, passionate contrition, and repulsive physiognomy as godly attributes of women's piety. The lives of male saints similarly contain the spiritual motifs of claustration, super-human fasting, and terrifying appearance. Theodoret, in his *Life of Symeon Stylites*, asserts that Symeon sealed himself in a small cottage for three years but then abandoned his hut to mount the pillar where he publicly fought paganism and imitated the marvelous deeds of Elijah and Christ.⁷¹ Atop his column, Symeon displays his charismatic descent from the Hebrew prophets by wearing animal skins, and he exhibits his body as that of Christ crucified to the multitudes of pilgrims who come to him for a blessing. The ascetic life cycle of desert holy women such as Domnina witnesses similar spiritual configurations. Most female recluses, however, do not roam the open desert and do not display their bodies before Christian pilgrims and disciples. Instead, they conceal their emaciated skin and bones under heavy mantles. They sojourn as enshrined penitents who receive divine gifts as a consequence of their miraculous transformation of the female body into a vehicle of grace. In these sacred fictions, women, who were first alienated from God (Genesis 3.6), can be reconciled to the Creator through fervent asceticism. The heroic *vitae* of Syrian and Egyptian recluses would inspire hagiographers of other women and men, such as the patrician saints of the late Roman empire, who took up the life of radical self-denial in a modified manner.

Sacred Models (2): The Patrician Intellectual and Philanthropist

The problem facing the authors of the lives of patrician saints was how to duplicate the symbolic affinity between desert ascetic and Hebrew prophet within the refined and urbanized milieu of Mediterranean nobility. The solution was found in the very nature of early Christian discourse; because such discourse was structured on a series of paradoxical images, it allowed

the sacred biographers of the late Roman aristocracy to appropriate prophetic and charismatic prototypes and apply them to the urban elite of late antiquity. The result was a brilliant re-creation of the eastern desert model within the bustling urban centers of Rome and Constantinople. If the King of Heaven had assumed the guise of a common pilgrim, then the Mediterranean nobility could devoutly mimic the austerity of desert anchorites. Through the *imitatio Christi*, the wealthy could become symbolically poor, uncultivated, and unwashed. By combining the rhetorical style of classical authors with the simple parables of scripture, the church fathers created lively *vitae* of noble saints whose heroic renunciation inspired Christians of all social classes to venture a symbolic life of poverty.⁷²

The church father and biblical exegete Jerome employs the paradoxical imagery of Christian discourse to decode the increasingly peculiar behavior of his most intimate associates in Rome. One of his favorite literary devices is the inversion of material culture to signify the conversion of an aristocratic soul. In *Epistle 66*, Jerome uses the changed clothing of a senatorial aristocrat and personal friend, the patrician Pammachius, to depict the rejection of pagan, political power. Jerome asks his reader: "Who would have believed that this grandson of consuls and the glorious scion of the Furii clan went forth into the Senate cloaked in mourning black amid the Senators' purple robes, and he was not ashamed to pass by the eyes of that assembly, but even scorned those who scorned him."⁷³ This passage ingeniously exemplifies the appropriation of classical rhetoric by patristic hagiographers in order to glorify Christian ascetics. Jerome's *Epistle* is an inversion of Cicero's famous *Letter to Atticus*, in which Cicero acknowledges that those senators who were publicly *infames* (loss of *fama*, *existimatio*) were required to adopt the dark mourning tunic (*toga pulla*).⁷⁴ Jerome's reconstruction of Pammachius's violation of the ritualized space of the Senate heralds the conversion of the Roman elite through the inversion of the official toga.

Roman law regulated the official dress of public men and dictated the kinds of garments that could be worn within the precincts of the Curia. The toga represented the old order of moral righteousness and republicanism and signified the political, social, economic, sexual, and religious status of its wearer. This multifunctional garment symbolized the wordly dignity and authority of politicians, lawyers, and administrators. According to Roman tradition, the *toga pulla* was to be worn only during times of bereavement or during religious rites; donning the garment at any other time was considered "inauspicious."⁷⁵ Jerome dressed his ascetic friend in

the distinctive mourning tunic, and, for his readers, the *toga pulla* grievously desecrated the sober atmosphere of the political arena. The literary image of the reclothed Pammachius serves two additional rhetorical functions: it connects him with biblical prophets, Christ, and the desert hermits; and it signals the eradication of the senator's former lifestyle as the public man. The patrician adopts the attire of "the poor, the mourning, and the ignoble" (*infamia*) to signify his rejection of secular authority in favor of the charismatic power of holy men. Pammachius parades his imitation of the desert fathers in the Senate, the seat of Roman secular power.

Patristic hagiographers, such as Jerome, Augustine, Basil, Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa, tested the boundaries of Christian paradox through their inverted depictions of patrician saints. For them, the mythical eastern desert was less a holy place than it was a style of life. Any elite Christian who repudiated worldly power, property, familial ties, and all the other imperatives of an aristocratic existence could recapture the "primal freedom" of the Egyptian desert.⁷⁶ Moreover, in emulating the heroic asceticism of the desert, male patrician *vitae* also stress the importance of these noble saints as church administrators and theologians. The sacred biographies of the intellectual, cultural, and economic elite thus fuse both active and contemplative models of Christian piety. In their *vitae* these holy men supplant classical scholarly retirement (*otium*) with Christian asceticism and replace duty (*officium*) to the state with ministry to the poor.

Although Jerome does describe the radical conversion of a few of his male friends, most of his accounts focus on aristocratic women who substitute apostolic poverty for lavish ostentation.⁷⁷ Jerome's *Life of Paula*, for example, provides an excellent female parallel to his depiction of the senator Pammachius.⁷⁸ Just as Pammachius shows his contempt for worldly ambition by wearing the mourning toga instead of senatorial garb, so Jerome's disciple Paula obliterates the feminine vice of self-indulgence through her exchange of patrician silks for garments of fetid goat hair. Jerome constructs his sacred portrait of Paula by shrewdly altering established literary conventions of female piety, reworking the classical model of the Roman matron into a charismatic paradigm. Of course, not all such women aspired to the elevated piety of Paula. For those Roman matrons who disdained donning foul animal skins, Jerome's textual image of the ideal holy woman might serve at least as a figurative guide for the restraint of materialistic appetites by aristocratic females.

Classical rhetoric portrayed the ideal Roman matron as attractive, wealthy, well-born, fertile, and chaste.⁷⁹ This literary archetype of virtue

centered on female devotion to husband, family, household, and wool-working. A second-century BCE funerary inscription of a woman named Claudia propagates the matron prototype: “[Claudia] loved her husband in her heart. She bore two sons, one of whom she left on earth, the other beneath it. She was pleasant to talk with, and she walked with grace. She kept the house and worked in wool.”⁸⁰ In his portraits of noble Roman women, Jerome appropriates the familiar literary paradigm of the deferential matron, but he uses it to champion Christian spirituality and asceticism over mundane domestic duty. According to Jerome’s holy portrait, Paula is the scion of one of the most noble clans in Rome, and yet she rejects her lineage to embrace a spiritual family of ascetics, bishops, monks, and nuns. The widowed Paula replaces the love of an earthly husband with that of a divine groom; she abandons her children in Rome to nurse mystically the infant Jesus at Bethlehem. The matron works wool not with her daughters in Rome but with her spiritual sisters, the nuns of Bethlehem. She is such a devout philanthropist that she impoverishes her heirs to enrich the church. And the formerly stunning woman ravages her face and body so that she can become the repentant daughter of Zion who wears sackcloth and shaves her head (Isaiah 3.24). In this sacred biography, Jerome employs all the accepted feminine virtues—devotion to husband and children, charity, and physical beauty—to demonstrate how earthly values can be converted to celestial ones.

Jerome also uses his image of the spiritual Paula to castigate the universal degeneracy of womankind and admonish Roman matrons for their excesses. In the first half of the second century CE, the poet Juvenal’s *Sixth Satire* savagely mocked the insatiable passions of upper-class Roman women to highlight the moral decline of the capital city. Juvenal provides a catalogue of the vices of imperial women: they engage in perverse sexual acts, abort the offspring of adulterous affairs, sadistically dominate men, disguise their putrid flesh with layers of makeup, and squander ancestral wealth on muscular gladiators and beauty lotions. Juvenal’s elite trollops parody the chastity, modesty, and humility of archetypal Roman matrons.⁸¹ Jerome, who in many of his writings reproduces Juvenal’s misogynist rhetoric, asserts that the holy Paula attacked her body with a harsh ascetic regime to atone for the years she spent as a sensual woman who painted her face and pursued sexual pleasures. The newly austere matron marred her face with rivers of tears to repent the hours she previously had spent in frivolity. She replaced the jewels and silks she had worn in her debauched life with a coarse mantle of rank animal hair. Jerome’s hagio-

graphic depiction of Paula's ascetic exercises serves as a spiritual remedy for that corruption. His account of Paula—no doubt heightened and idealized to suit his exegetical purposes—detailed her transformation from a self-indulgent patrician into a philanthropic recluse and thus provided a model and inspiration for other aristocratic women who might also refashion their bodies into vessels of grace. The spiritual portrait of Paula assured them that they too could appeal to the restorative powers of the cross.

Sacred Models (3): The Pastoral Bishop and Cloistered Nun

The sacred models of pastoral holy man and nun transfer the *imitatio Christi* from the eastern deserts and Mediterranean capitals to the Gallo-Roman episcopacy and cloisters of northern Europe. One of the most influential early Gallo-Roman *vitae* is the fourth-century *Life of Martin of Tours* by Sulpicius Severus, an educated nobleman from Aquitaine.⁸² Sulpicius produces a composite conception of the peculiar bishop by fusing Hebrew, Christian, and Roman portraits of exceptional men.⁸³ Martin (c. 336–397), in his sacred biography, administers monasteries, rules Christian communities, and engages in prophetic, ascetic, and charismatic feats.

In addition to writing the holy biography of his friend and mentor, Sulpicius accumulated an inventory of Martin's miraculous activities in a work known as the *Dialogues*.⁸⁴ In the *Dialogues*, Sulpicius proclaims the popularity of his saint, pointing out that his *Vita Martini* had circulated throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East and that, even during Sulpicius's own lifetime, zealous shoppers in Rome had fought over the remaining copies.⁸⁵ For emphasis, Sulpicius invents a conversation between himself and a friend who had just returned from Egypt. The author's companion confides in the hagiographer how universal was the appeal of Martin's *vita*: "I saw it being read by an old man in the desert. . . . When I told him that I was your friend he asked me to ask you for more miracles."⁸⁶ Sulpicius's apocryphal dialogue thus reverses the direction of ascetic discourse, which had been from East to West. No longer merely the student of the Egyptian fathers, Martin is now the master teacher of the eastern hermits.

In his textual depiction of Martin of Tours, Sulpicius adopts both biblical and extra-biblical spiritual prototypes and creates the monk-bishop *topos* that was to become the primary model for early medieval male saints.⁸⁷ He portrays Martin not only as a Hebrew prophet and Christ-like exorcist but also as a missionary apostle, a desert anchorite, and a pastoral

bishop. As Sulpicius relates, Martin, a Pannonian by birth, had quit the Roman army to embrace the life of militant self-denial and, by 372, was elected bishop of Tours. As a bishop, however, Martin had little in common with his aristocratic contemporaries who sat on thrones (*cathedrae*) and wore ceremonial vestments. Moreover, Martin's physiognomy was an anomaly among the elite bishops of Gaul whose refined lifestyles hinted at spiritual sloth. Sulpicius describes how Martin stood out among his colleagues: they were blind to his Elijah aspect and repelled by his looks, finding the holy man to be "a despicable individual and quite unfit to be a bishop, what with his insignificant appearance, sordid garments, and his disgraceful hair."⁸⁸ Although Martin was a consecrated member of an educated church hierarchy, his physical presence was that of an uncivilized Hebrew prophet.

The hagiographical construction of Martin presents the ascetic bishop as a biblical hero who could withstand poison, demolish pagan temples, and speak with the dead; amid these remarkable feats, he ably performed his pastoral duties. The hagiographer proclaims that his Martin outshines the Egyptian anchorites because, as bishop of Tours, he labors in the arenas of both contemplative asceticism and active ministry.⁸⁹ Sulpicius's portrait of the holy man as prophetic, nurturing, and dutiful represents Martin as a point of convergence of all Hebrew, Christian, and Roman virtues.

The successors to Martin's archetypal hagiographical image are other Gallo-Roman administrative bishops who imitate Martin's prophetic and pastoral style. For example, the fifth-century hagiographer of Germanus of Auxerre (c. 378–449) recounts how the future saint joined the ecclesiastical hierarchy after having been the secular governor (*dux*) of a province in Gaul.⁹⁰ The ex-governor's sacred biography connects him with the most austere Egyptian hermits as well as the most successful Roman politicians. Although he sleeps on an "Egyptian bed" made of pieces of sacking spread over rough wooden planks cemented with ashes, Germanus remains a judge, diplomat, and urban patron.

In a uniquely feminine manner, the *vitae* of Merovingian holy women also merge the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Sixth- and seventh-century hagiographers compiled a corpus of saintly biographies of noble women to instruct all females in the godly life of renunciation. These women, like their late Roman patristic predecessors, were mainly scions of aristocratic clans who abandoned families and wealth to become abbesses or nuns in important ascetic communities.⁹¹ The hagiographers who immortalized the famous residents of these cloisters, such as Radegund, Sad-

alberga, Aldegund, and Burgundofara, endow the holy women with the powers possessed by the exotic Martin of Tours. Radegund of Poitiers protects her holy community with the *signum crucis*: "One of the sisters saw a thousand thousand demons standing on top of the wall in the form of goats. When the saint raised her blessed right hand in the sign of the cross, this whole multitude of demons fled, never to be seen again."⁹² Her charismatic hair shirt resurjects a diseased child: "As soon as the infant's body touched the most medicinal garment and those noble rags, he came back from the dead to normal life."⁹³ Saldalberga of Laon experiences celestial visions of paradise reminiscent of the prophet Ezekiel's ecstatic revelations: "And he showed her the city of the most high God, and the seats of the twelve Apostles reddening with gold and gems."⁹⁴

In addition to exhibiting charismatic power in their *vitae*, Merovingian holy women appropriate the consecrated powers and pastoral responsibilities of urban bishops. According to the life of the seventh-century mystic Aldegund of Maubeuge, a sleeping nun receives a vision of Aldegund standing before the altar in the place of a priest, breaking the eucharist and placing it in the chalice.⁹⁵ The life of the seventh-century Burgundofara of Faremoutiers claims that the abbess heard the confessions of her nuns three times a day and that she administered communion to a dying woman.⁹⁶ Holy women such as Aldegund and Burgundofara mirror the active ministry of Christian bishops by teaching, financing public works, administering cloisters, and procuring relics. Early medieval hagiographers depict female saints who perform many of the functions of the male priesthood, albeit with a subtle, gendered difference.

The hagiographical construction of early medieval female saints probes the limits of Christian paradox. Women's *vitae* contain extreme examples of self-mortification, ecstatic power, and apostolic ministry, yet these symbolic lives also promote a feminized sanctity. Like Jerome's Roman matrons and virgins who take up the cross as an indictment of worldly women, the transformation of Frankish noblewomen into receptacles of the Holy Spirit rebukes universal feminine vice. Hagiographical texts promote austere attire, charity, domestic servitude, self-mortification, and claustration as the spiritual remedies for female profligacy.

The anonymous author of the early sixth-century life of the ascetic Genovefa of Paris asserts that the repudiation of bodily adornment is a primary attribute of female sanctity. According to the *vita*, Bishop Germanus of Auxerre gave the young Genovefa a necklace made from a copper coin inscribed with the sign of the cross. The holy man instructed the child

always to wear this austere necklace, to think of him when she looked at it, and never to allow her body to be decorated with precious gems and pearls. Celestial ornamentation of the soul, the bishop cautioned the little saint, could only be achieved by eradicating earthly luxury.⁹⁷ Adult women saints, according to their *vitae*, reject the opulent clothing of the Germanic aristocracy in favor of goat-hair mantles, and they redirect the wealth of their noble families into the service of the church by embellishing altars, oratories, and saintly tombs.⁹⁸ The sacred portraits of these abstemious women validate the renunciation of a noble birth by emphasizing domestic servitude. Frankish hagiographers often portray cloistered women as charismatic housekeepers who perform domestic miracles, cheerfully clean latrines, dust altars, wash saints' crypts, tend the hearth, and minister at table. In addition, sacred biographies demonstrate how enclosure and asceticism remake carnal bodies into spiritual vessels.

Merovingian nuns discipline their rebellious flesh through gruesome acts of mortification. In fact, one of the most extreme descriptions of ascetic self-crucifixion is from a woman's *vita*.⁹⁹ In the sixth-century spiritual biography of Queen Radegund of Poitiers, the saint literally becomes a superhuman Syrian ascetic. She encircles her upper body with iron fetters, covers her limbs in goat hair, prays by the latrine, and burns the sign of the cross on her flesh with a red-hot crucifix. Radegund, like Jerome's Paula, atones for her former earthly life as a regal spouse through extreme asceticism and is thus transformed into a bride of Christ. The queen performs these rituals of self-torture inside a tiny cell, an enclosure that served to focus her charismatic powers, where she was endowed with the biblical gifts of healing the sick, resurrecting the dead, and exorcizing demons.¹⁰⁰ The dual hagiographical images of self-flagellation and rigorous enclosure, in both Syrian and Frankish female *vitae*, empower holy women with the mysterious *charismata* of the male prophets, martyrs, and ascetics. The Merovingian corpus of *vitae*, like its desert and patrician equivalents, preaches austerity and enclosure as the focal points of women's power and presents the enshrined female body as a vehicle for the salvation of humankind.

Hagiographical discourse is a highly complicated, symbolic genre which serves a variety of cultic, mimetic, and educational purposes for both elite and popular audiences. Christian congregations absorbed the lessons of hallowed *vitae* through the mediums of written texts, liturgical performances, material culture, and art. Sacred biography, in all its various

forms, facilitated the creation, preservation, and extension of Christian sanctity in an era when there was no systematic, institutionalized process of identifying a saint. Hallowed lives played a crucial role in the development of late antique Christianity. Syrian, Egyptian, Roman, Greek, and Gallo-Roman hagiographers used biblical models in their narrative accounts of contemporary holy women and men to recast Palestinian culture in their own terms. Saints' *vitae* provided written testimonies to God's perpetual intervention in human affairs, even in locations as far away from Jerusalem as Tours, Kildare, or Durham. As a coercive discourse, intended to bend the recipient to its imperatives, hagiography dictated proper reverence for sacred behavior. The text of a saint's life, like a liturgical object or the eucharist, functioned as an earthly doorway to the divine because symbolic *vitae* united the faithful with God.

The three paradigms examined in this chapter illustrate the hermeneutical complexities of the genre of hagiography, for, on the surface, male and female models of sanctity share similar rhetorical strategies and biblical images. A careful reading of these texts, however, reveals the subtle differences between the portrayals of women's and men's lives. Whereas male sacred biographies reproduce the militant and prophetic powers of biblical heroes, female *vitae* duplicate the doubled-edged biblical *topos* of impenitent woman as sinful humanity and repentant woman as harbinger of universal salvation.

Gender, Hagiography, and the Bible

AS THE MOST HEAVILY SCRUTINIZED BOOK of the medieval era, the Bible created the normative principles of medieval culture.¹ Biblical images of women encompass the entire spectrum of Hebrew and Christian spirituality. Pregnant women symbolize the heavenly prototype of the earthly community (Revelation 12.1), and maternal and bridal figures represent earthly Jerusalem and the church (1 Samuel 1–2; Galatians 4.26–27; Revelation 19.7–8, 21.2ff). Hebrew women serve as the guardians of Israel (Judges 5.7) and personify human virtue (Proverbs 31.10–31), while powerful holy women possess the gifts of prophecy and political arbitration (Judges 4; Acts 21.9). Christian scripture portrays a handful of contrite women as believers of superior faith to most men (Mark 5.25–34, 7.24–30; Matthew 9.20–22, 15.21–28; Luke 8.43–48; John 11.1–3, 20–44). Repentant and mourning women function as the human signifiers of contrition, compunction, and submission to the will of God (Luke 1.26ff, 8.2–3, 15.8–10; John 4.7–30, 19.25). Both Hebrew and Christian females personify the contemplative and active components of spirituality (Genesis 29.16ff; Luke 10.38–42), and they sponsor and serve holy men (2 Kings 4.8–10; Mark 1.29–31; Matthew 8.14–15; Luke 4.38–39; Acts 9.36–41, 16.13–15). A few Christian women perform the duties of missionaries and deacons (Acts 18.1–26; 1 Corinthians 16.19; Romans 16.1–4; Philippians 4.2–3; Philemon 2). These unconventional depictions of spiritual women, however, are counterbalanced by more traditional representations of women as the embodiments of fleshly sin.

Corrupt female characters in sacred writings function as the incarnation of lust, idolatry, and prideful self-indulgence, and therefore they personify the part of human nature that is alienated from God. A few of the most important metaphors in Hebrew and Christian scripture rely on the image of woman as sin. In the Pentateuch, the harlot-figure exemplifies

apostate Israel and other debauched women symbolize the tyrannical empires of the ancient Near East and their associated urban vices (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16, 23; Isaiah 23.17–18; Nahum 3.4). The book of Revelation (17–18) reproduces the harlot *topos* by identifying Babylon or the Roman Empire as a drunken whore. Guardians and destroyers of Israel, biblical women are simultaneously intimate with and estranged from God.

The Hebrew and Christian scriptures focus on physical appearance, spinning, domestic service, patronage, and contrition as the outward manifestations of feminine piety. Biblical representations of female spirituality surface in later patristic, monastic, and conciliar writings that simultaneously empower and domesticate women's spiritual prowess. The starting point for any consideration of gender and sacred discourse is the Hebrew depiction of the expulsion of Eve and Adam from paradise (Genesis 2–3) and the resulting division of labor between the sexes. The Judaic and Christian interpretations of this famous passage range from praise for Eve's acquisition of knowledge and condemnation of Adam's passivity to denunciation of Eve's seduction by the serpent and her subsequent enticement of Adam.² From the patristic period, biblical exegetes have concentrated on the story of the expulsion through the parable of human sexuality. The most immediate ramification of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, however, is God's merciful act of reclothing their naked bodies. In the *City of God*, Augustine explains that, in Genesis 3, God stripped off the garment of grace (immortality) and reclothed the first couple with garments of skin (mortality).³ According to Genesis 3, clothing is the material representation of humankind's fallen state, and, in the subsequent books of the Hebrew Bible, ornamentation of women's bodies personifies further apostasy from God.

Biblical Clothing

"And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them" (Genesis 3.21). The expulsion of Eve and Adam from the garden and God's subsequent reclothing of the first couple in animal skins symbolize the death of their prelapsarian bodies and the birth of their animal-like mortality.⁴ The Hebrew prophets, Christian evangelists and apostles, and patristic writers are extremely sensitive to the rhetorical purposes of clothing in the Torah. Because the reclothed human body is such an important image in this fundamental text from Genesis, early church fathers interpret subsequent books of the Hebrew Bible as using symbolic

clothing and hairstyles of individual humans as the outward manifestations of their inward piety or impiety. According to this exegetical tradition, the Pentateuch and the prophetic books of the Bible signify the corruption of the human soul by the increasingly elaborate ornamentation of the body.⁵ The differences between symbolic male and female dress found in these books reflect ancient gender precepts of carnality as feminine and spirituality as masculine. In particular, women's clothing denotes defilement, apostasy, and the eventual destruction of Israel. The charismatic hair shirts of the Hebrew prophets, in contrast, serve as the focal point of masculine power and as the signifiers of the male prophets' proximity to the pristine human status before the fall.

In the Hebrew Bible, animal-hair garments manifest the charismatic and prophetic powers of God's holy men. Although nudity is the natural garment of the undefiled body, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden made the veiling of the shameful, defiled body a necessary part of human existence. Certain humans, however, continue to wear the primitive clothing of the first couple. For example, God wraps the prophets Elijah and Elisha, like Adam and Eve, in animal garments (2 Kings 1.8), rendering the ascetic attire of the two prophets only one step removed from the prelapsarian nudity of Eden.⁶ When Elijah ascends to heaven on a fiery chariot, he throws off his camel-hair mantle because nudity is the dress of paradise (2 Kings 2.13). Similarly, the gospel of John suggests that nudity is the celestial garment of the body by emphasizing that, when Simon Peter and John opened Christ's tomb, they found only the linen cloths that had covered the sacred corpse (John 20.5).

In addition to relating the proximity of the prophets to Eden, ascetic mantles are indicators of the miraculous powers of Hebrew holy men. Elijah's cloak parts rivers (2 Kings 2.14) and enables the prophet to hear God's voice: "He wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kings 19.13). The hairy tunics of Hebrew and Christian ascetics connect holy men to the animal world, which is free of the taint of human civilization and its associated vices. The nude bodies of exceptional saints, according to Christian hagiographers, reflect the purity of the resurrected flesh. For example, the Gallo-Roman writer, Sulpicius Severus, recalls one Egyptian hermit who lived in such a state of divine grace that he had no need of clothing, and his body was covered only by his long hair and beard.⁷ The outward appearance and dress of Hebrew and Christian holy men herald both their charismatic

authority and their intimacy with God. The clothing of biblical women, however, serves a different rhetorical purpose. Whereas male garments signify power, female clothing usually represents sin or women's subordination to the authority of men.

Opulent women's clothing is a primary metaphor of the defilement of Hebrew piety through urban decadence; it signifies human pride, vanity, deceit, and lust while underscoring the alienation of humans from God.⁸ According to the prophet Isaiah, the corruption of humankind is epitomized by the outward demeanor and dress of the daughters of Zion. All human vice is manifested in the "finery of anklets, the headbands and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans, and veils" of these depraved women (Isaiah 3.16–23). Isaiah prophesies that God will cleanse the filth of the daughters of Zion and the Creator will transform their perfumes, fine robes, and pride into stench, sackcloth, and shame (Isaiah 3.24–4.4). The adoption of sackcloth by women is not an act of power but an act of repentance for their true nature. The book of Revelation (17.4) mirrors Isaiah's use of ornamentation as the *signum* of human depravity in a rebuke of the perversions of immoral Rome: "The woman [Rome] was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication." The adorned body of a woman is the physical representation of human sin.

Individual women, such as the infamous Jezebel, assume the guise of the unrighteous daughters of Zion and Revelation's debauched harlot: "She [Jezebel] painted her eyes, and adorned her head" (2 Kings 9.30). The biblical Jezebel is a Phoenician idolater who takes her meals with "four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba'al and the four hundred prophets of Ashe'rah" (1 Kings 18.19).⁹ The Phoenician woman also dominates her husband Ahab, King of Israel and Samaria (1 Kings 16.31–32), whom she induces to dedicate altars to the fertility deity Ba'al. The heathen queen orders the murder of Yahweh's prophets (1 Kings 18.13), attempts to destroy Elijah (1 Kings 18), and forces Ahab to kill an innocent man and seize his property (1 Kings 21.5–16). Elijah, after he defeats Jezebel's prophets at Mount Carmel, curses his female nemesis and prophesies that "the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her" (2 Kings 9.10). Jezebel, the supreme personification of human apostasy

from God, suffers one of the most gruesome deaths in the Bible. Her rebellious eunuchs throw the impious woman out of a window, her blood splatters the courtyard, and horses trample her body so savagely that only her skull, feet, and the palms of her hands are left to be fed to the dogs. Jezebel's executor, Jehu, pronounces that the wretched queen's corpse "shall be as dung upon the face of the field" (2 Kings 9.37). Jezebel, the unrepentant daughter of Zion, would later become the model in hagiographical discourse for all women who hinder the work of holy men.¹⁰

The transformation of the daughters of Zion from vehicles of sin into vehicles of repentance is one of the most important biblical images for subsequent depictions of holy women. Only through the eradication of outward ornament can women atone for the vices of their sex. For male prophets, ascetic garb makes a statement about otherworldly power, connects these charismatic men to the biblical past, and places them outside the boundaries of human society. In contrast, women's adoption of mourning dress is symbolic of the inherent depravity of the female sex and the necessity of physical penance.

Hairstyles, as depicted in holy scripture, also serve as outward indicators of either righteousness or ritual pollution. In the Hebrew Bible hairstyles are used metaphorically as *signa* of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 5.1–2) and the consecrated power of priests (Leviticus 21.10). In both Christian and Hebrew scripture, the arrangement of the hair represents holiness and apostasy, as well as physical strength, contrition, and bodily defilement.¹¹ Depictions of ritual hairstyles in the Hebrew Bible are but part of a larger series of strictures concerning purity, prayer, and offerings whereas, in the Pauline epistles, hairstyles and clothing function as the outward manifestations of the temporal social order necessitated by the fall from grace (Genesis 3).

The academic investigation into Paul's views on women and gender has inspired some of the most volatile theological debates of the last two decades.¹² Much of this scholarly disputation has centered around Paul's support of women as missionaries, patrons, and local church leaders as well as his advocacy of women's subjugation to the authority of men. In the tradition that ascribes all the "Pauline epistles"¹³ to the apostle himself, the most provocative passage concerning the relationship between the sexes is in Galatians 3.28: "There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Theologians and church historians have suggested that this passage is a pronouncement of mythical androgyny, a preaching device designed for mixed-sex audiences, a baptismal rite, or an announce-

ment of eschatological equality between the sexes.¹⁴ Galatians (3.28) can also be interpreted as a continuation of the “world upside down” leitmotif found in the life of Christ. Early Christian communities may have believed that there would be no supremacy based on sex, legal status, or economic status during the Final Judgment. Galatians (3.28) therefore could be a statement about the order of redemption which recognizes no hierarchy in contrast to the order of creation that results in a sexual hierarchy of male-female (Genesis 2). Certain sections of the Pauline corpus suggest that Christ’s disciples advocated the traditional subordination of woman to man, and, consequently, these texts devote a great deal of attention to the outward demeanor and appearance of Christian women and less attention to the clothing, hair, and deportment of Christian men.

Some of the most famous passages from the epistles dictate the public activity and appearance of women. These sections clearly uphold the directive of Deuteronomy (22.5): “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” Cross-dressing, in a Hebrew context, was a form of ritual impurity because it rendered men and women “imperfect members of their class.”¹⁵ The “Pauline” (c. 50s-60s) and other epistles, 1-2 Timothy and 1-2 Peter (c. 50-120), follow the purity laws of Deuteronomy, imposing proper female behavior and appearance in the community or *ecclesia*.¹⁶

Several passages establish a sex-specific procedure for prayer in 1 Corinthians (11.3-16). Although Moses and Elijah were required to veil their heads when they spoke with Yahweh, the incarnation of God in human flesh allowed men to approach the Godhead without veils: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3.18).¹⁷ Christian men, the text emphasizes, must pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered because they are the “image and glory of God,” but women who do so are to wear veils. The veil is a visible reminder of woman’s second place in creation and her subordination to male authority because “woman is the reflection of man” (1 Corinthians 11.7).¹⁸ A woman’s veil is defined as “a symbol of authority on her head” (1 Corinthians 11.10). If a female member of the community refuses to veil her head while praying or prophesying in public, the apostle decrees that “she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil” (1 Corinthians 11.6). Shaving the head, according to Hebrew scripture, is a remedy for making an unclean person clean (Leviticus 14.8), an act of taking away power (Judges 16.19), and a sign of spiritual repentance

(Isaiah 3.24). Paul, in 1 Corinthians (11.6–7), suggests that an unveiled woman who does not shave her head is polluted, unrepentant, and defiant of the biblical order of creation. A male member of the *ecclesia* who refuses to cut his hair similarly transgresses the authority of Genesis (2).

In 1 Corinthians (11.14), Paul, who himself had cut his hair short at Cenchreae because of a vow (Acts 18.18), advises Christian men to wear their hair short, as long hair is dishonorable to their sex (1 Corinthians 11.14). Here Paul appears to be ignoring the Hebrew Bible's great hero, Samson the Nazarene (Judges 13–16), whose famous long hair signified his physical strength. The Nazarenes, however, let their hair grow only for brief periods of time so that they could cut it off and offer it to the Temple (Numbers 6.18). Their shorn heads would then symbolize purity and obedience to God. Christian women, however, are to keep their hair long as a "covering" (1 Corinthians 11.15). Paul seems to be arguing in 1 Corinthians (11.3–16) that the earthly relationship between woman and man must conform to the story of creation from Genesis (2). Man is made in the image of God, and, since woman is made from man, her physical appearance must reflect her subsidiary status. Long hair emasculates a man, whereas short hair empowers a woman. For Paul, cross-gendering violates Hebrew purity laws because a feminized man or a masculinized woman is ritually unclean. Any transgression of gender lines could potentially result in the contamination of the entire community and breach the natural order of creation as presented in Genesis (2). Both proper clothing and hair must reflect the divine order of the universe.

Paul ordains in 1 Corinthians (14.33–36) that women should remain silent in the community. This controversial passage has been explained as a later interpolation of 1 Corinthians (11.3–16) because it contradicts the apostle's earlier directive that women can pray as long as their heads are covered.¹⁹ It is possible that these apparently dissenting passages reflect Paul's own struggle with the role of women in the church.²⁰ He tempers his radical support of women's celibacy, prophesy, missionary work, and the female diaconate by dictating the communal conduct of ordinary women in more traditional terms. When Paul writes of extraordinary women, such as Phoebe, the deacon of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16.1–2), he leaves aside such patriarchal edicts: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon [*diakonos*] of the church at Cenchreae . . . for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well." When he writes about women generally, however, he turns to conservative gender precepts and affirms gender divisions. The post-Pauline epistles, 1 Timothy and

1 Peter, highlight women's role in bringing sin into the world. The same letters also preach that women must combat continuously their inherent depravity.

1 Timothy 2.13–14 contains an exegesis on Genesis 2–3 which names Eve as the guilty party in the story of the fall: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” The apostle Paul himself had named Adam as the violator of divine commandment: “Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Romans 5.12). The epistles of Timothy and Peter, which include some of the most vehement attacks on women in the corpus, amplify the apostle's directives concerning female behavior and appearance and incorporate the Hebrew Bible's metaphor of the adorned woman as the embodiment of sin.

1 Peter and 1 Timothy apply Pauline rhetoric by proclaiming that women shall have no authority over men, they shall not teach men, and that they shall be “saved through bearing children” (1 Timothy 2.12–15). In a Christian redaction of the “daughters of Zion” metaphor, the author of 1 Peter (3.3–4) castigates women who wear luxurious clothing, display extravagant jewelry, and braid their hair.²¹ 1 Timothy advises modest dress and submissive demeanor as the spiritual remedies for feminine wiles. The virtuous woman, according to both Timothy and Peter, should engage in charity and hospitality. She should be submissive to male authority, and she should acquiesce to her husband as “Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1 Peter 3.6). The Christian woman should be modest, chaste, and domestic; she should wash “the feet of the saints” (1 Timothy 5.10). The pious matron should avoid the traditional female vices of idleness, quarrelsomeness, and self-indulgence, and she should not fall prey to false teachings (1 Timothy 5.11–13; 2 Timothy 3.6–7).

Whereas ideal female behavior in biblical rhetoric centers on domestic matters and physical appearance, exemplary male conduct is associated with public duty. The apostolic directives concerning public male demeanor concentrate on the qualities that make good administrators: temperance, intelligence, dignity, diplomacy, generosity, and sensitivity (1 Timothy 3). An effective bishop, according to 1 Timothy, must be able to rule his wife and children, “for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church?” (1 Timothy 3.5). The mandates concerning male and female comportment reveal a concern for the reputation of the *ecclesia* in the non-Christian world, but the guidelines for churchmen additionally emphasize public accountability and male

authority over a household. The edicts for women accentuate the importance of female submission to the authority of men and the eradication of uniquely feminine sins.²²

*The Theology of the Cosmetic*²³

Patristic writings supplement the Pauline construction of the ideal Christian woman and prescribe mourning dress and penance as spiritual treatments for the female soul. The patristic authors further the gender directives of the Pauline corpus by arguing that Eve's fall from grace continuously manifests itself in the lavish apparel of degenerate women. The patristic writers who established the Christian rhetoric of the cosmetic partook of the wider classical worldview that connected self-presentation with either piety or impiety. Stoic philosophers, including Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), Musonius Rufus (c. 30–90s CE), and Epictetus (c. 50–130 CE), believed that the physical appearance of public men should reflect their interior virtue. Patristic writers, however, shifted the Stoic emphasis on male dress to that of female adornment to theologize Eve's role in the fall from grace. Christian theologians thus fused the Stoic rhetoric of outward appearance with the Hebrew discourse on exterior adornment as a *signum* of interior depravity. In urging women to adopt the mourning garb of the "daughters of Zion," theological treatises on women's dress and veils echo the rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible. Women who squander family fortunes on self-adornment are the unrepentant daughters of Eve.

Tertullian wrote the most impassioned castigation of female dress. He accuses women of destroying humankind by opening the door to the devil.²⁴ The theologian identifies the wardrobes of excessive, seductive women with the fall of Eve from primordial grace. Significantly, Tertullian argues that it was not covetousness of knowledge that led Eve into sin but desire for ornamentation.²⁵ He claims that if gems, gold, and embroidered clothing had been available to Eve after the expulsion, she would have cast aside the tunic of skins provided by God. The "daughters of Eve," he argues, "still think of putting adornments over the skins of animals."²⁶ Even luxuriant color connotes unnatural vice, for had God desired women to dress in brilliant colors he would have created blue and purple sheep. In Tertullian's opinion, Satan is a licentious artist who transformed the spiritual bodies of Adam and Eve into fleshly corpses. Satan's minions instruct women in the art of cosmetics and personal adornment and teach men the mysteries of metallurgy, astrology, herbal cures, and philosophy.²⁷ Men

pervert the natural order of the universe through illegitimate knowledge; women desecrate divine order through deceitful self-presentation.

The “cosmetic” theologian also argues that the angels mentioned by Paul are Satan’s servants who instruct women in the arts of bodily adornment (“That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels,” 1 Corinthians 11.10).²⁸ Tertullian supports the legitimacy of the apocryphal book of Enoch which details the legend of the fallen angels who seduce the “daughters of man.”²⁹ This legend is derived from Genesis (6.2), which enigmatically states that “the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose.” In *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian makes the direct connection between women’s veils and the angels who fall on account of earthly women. Men, Tertullian argues, do not need to veil their heads because they did not cause the angels to sin and because the head of man is Christ. Virginal veils serve as helmets and shields against temptation, scandal, and the seduction of angels.³⁰ The exegete adds at the end of this vituperative attack that fine clothes “are the trappings appropriate to a woman who was condemned and is dead, arrayed as if to lend splendor to her funeral.”³¹ Women thus must wear penitential garb to escape spiritual death and to expiate the original sin of Eve. Tertullian asserts that holy women who dress their bodies in austere and humble garments will be rewarded spiritually by having their souls adorned in silk and fine linen. Female ascetics must combat their natural inclination to tempt angelic beings by correlating their flesh to the austere physiognomies of poor apostles and undomesticated prophets.

The bishop and martyr Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258) defines the ideal apparel of holy women in his treatise *On the Dress of Virgins*, modeled after Tertullian’s discourse on ornamentation.³² The bishop states that “continence and modesty consist not alone in purity of the flesh, but also in modesty of dress and adornment.”³³ Humble dress therefore is a concrete sign of a woman’s chastity, which should be evident in the soul as well as to the physical eyes. Cyprian cites both the passages from Isaiah on the “daughters of Zion” (3.16ff) and the adorned harlot of Revelation (17.1–6) as justifications for his insistent condemnation of sumptuous female attire. “Apostate angels” induce women to put on jewelry and makeup, to dye their hair, and to take luxurious baths, but such alteration of a woman’s divinely given image, according to Cyprian, transforms her body into the devil’s vessel. After all, the bishop argues, if the Son of Man’s hair is “white as white wool, white as snow” (Revelation 1.14), then holy

women, in imitation of him, should be content with their postlapsarian bodies and not try to disguise their true nature through ornamentation.³⁴

Jerome similarly associates the fine raiment of Roman women with covetousness. He contrasts the hunger of Elijah, the nakedness of Christ, and the poverty of the apostles with the teeming closets of patrician women.³⁵ Jerome advises the mothers of young girls, who are vowed to virginity, to dress them in mourning garb (*pulla tunica*), such as little black cloaks, and to take away their elegant linens and gems.³⁶ In the hands of patristic writers, the Hebrew metaphor of the adorned woman is no longer merely a penitential *topos*; it has become part of a thriving theological exegesis on the fall.

The church fathers prescribe sober dress and veils as spiritual remedies for the natural pollution of womankind. Papal, episcopal, and monastic legislators gradually transformed the patristic discourse on corrupt female dress into ad hoc institutional practice.³⁷ Eastern and western church councils between the fourth and seventh centuries reiterated the apostle Paul's directives on women's public demeanor, veils, and dress. One fifth-century North African council forbids women to teach men in public. The same council mandates that women should wear appropriately somber vestments when receiving the veil from bishops. Church councils began to command virgins to strip off their silks, gold, and jewels and to stand at the altar in consecrated black.³⁸ The veiling of professed religious females was to be carried out in public, supervised by bishops. Episcopal councils also dictate the appropriate age for women to take the veil.³⁹ The papacy took similar actions to regulate the veiling of professional religious women and to forbid nuns from touching any of the sacred objects within the eucharistic spaces of churches.⁴⁰ A series of sixth-century Gallo-Roman church decrees require women to be veiled in the presence of the eucharist; they could not receive the eucharist in their bare hands, and they could not touch any consecrated objects.⁴¹

Legislation of the Council of Gangra (325–381), which was replicated in subsequent councils, cites Deuteronomy (22.5) and Paul (1 Corinthians 11.10) as authoritative justifications for its condemnation of “theatrical transvestism.”⁴² The denunciation of cross-dressing as theatrical suggests that the roots of transvestism are in mime and theatre. The canon forbidding cross-dressing follows a discussion of false ascetics who misuse the austere dress of spiritual men. A transvestite therefore violates the ritual purity regulations of the Hebrew Bible, transgresses the authority of the apostle Paul, disrupts social order, and emulates the decadence of pro-

fessional actors and mimes. Later episcopal councils condemn women's cross-dressing as a pagan abomination perhaps because ancient cults had practiced cross-dressing as part of their fertility rites. Fifth-century Roman law forbade women with shaved heads from crossing the threshold of churches, while legal texts threatened the expulsion of bishops who allowed bald women into their sanctuaries.⁴³ The condemnation of spiritual transvestism also appears in the hagiographical accounts of the fourth-century Pachomian monastery at Tabennisi in Egypt. According to tradition, the female community that was built across the river from the male *coenobium* adhered to the strict rule of Pachomius except that the women were forbidden from donning the goat hair worn by the male ascetics.⁴⁴

Subsequent monastic rules similarly safeguard female religious from their natural inclinations toward luxurious adornment and at the same time protect cloistered women from the rigorous regime of masculinized *askesis*. The first significant rule for women in the West, that of Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–542), emphasizes modest clothing and austere material possessions.⁴⁵ Clothing is such an important metaphor in Caesarius's monastic legislation that another sixth-century bishop in Gaul claimed that Caesarius's rule was "as sweet as a vestment of linen," perhaps a reference to Caesarius's own use of linen as symbolic of the spiritual "inner garments" of chaste souls.⁴⁶ The bishop of Arles wrote two monastic rules, one for the male community at Arles and the other for the women's cloister at Saint Jean which was under the direction of his sister, Caesaria.⁴⁷ In adapting his male rule to what he regarded as the unique spiritual requirements of the female sex, Caesarius added more detailed stipulations on material culture within the women's cloister.

Caesarius underscores the dangers of luxury within a women's community. He warns nuns (but not monks) against luxurious clothing, furnishings, and sacramental objects. Only in the rule for women does Caesarius provide a detailed description of dress. He bans bright colors and allows only milk-white dress or undyed cloth. He designates appropriate colors and textiles and even suggests which items may be embroidered. There is to be no purple trim, no purple dye, no silk, and no *bombycine* (a heavy fabric fashioned from mixed yarns).⁴⁸ According to Caesarius, female clothing—indeed, all objects in the women's cloister—should be selected and designed for the good of the spirit, not for earthly pleasure or physical ease. His influential rule for female religious was intended to combat the inherent feminine impulse toward luxury by carefully constructing its radical opposite—somber clothing and modest material objects.⁴⁹

Hagiographical *vitae* popularized the image of the solemn, veiled, or mourning holy woman. Women's changed dress became the central metaphor for the demise of their earthly attachment to ornamentation and the rebirth of their life of ascetic penance because sacred scripture and patristic discourse associated the feminine with vanity and self-indulgence.⁵⁰ Late antique and early medieval holy women reverse Eve's covetousness of ornamentation by wearing undyed, austere attire and by donating their luxurious material objects to the churches and tombs of the holy dead. There were a handful of holy women who donned the charismatic hair shirts of the Hebrew prophets and male ascetics as well as the mourning dress of the daughters of Zion. Most church fathers disapproved of women who adopted masculine dress, and they upheld Paul's ordinances concerning gender distinctions and social order. Sacred fictions, in spite of patristic and episcopal proscriptions of spiritual cross-dressing, continue to record the legendary lives of the great transvestite saints. Obviously, tantalizing sacred portraits of women who shave their heads and put on male ascetic attire continued to intrigue both hagiographers and their audiences.⁵¹ Other sanctified women wear linen, which represents both "the righteous deeds of the saints" (Revelation 19.8) and Christ's resurrection.⁵² Saints, even as young girls, repudiate sparkling gems, desire to wear "Christ's" unstained linen, and receive ecstatic visions of their future veilings.⁵³

In the late antique theological world, veiling of women typically signified their second place in creation, their role in the fall, and the resulting submission of women to male authority.⁵⁴ By the early Middle Ages, however, the veil also became an emblem of a woman's spiritual vocation; it signified her disengagement from marriage and the family and was the cynosure of her otherworldly citizenship. Virgin's veils possess miraculous powers and are capable of withstanding swords because the veil, like virginity, is impermeable.⁵⁵ The hair of these righteous females has none of the negative connotations of feminine hair in classical and sacred discourse; remnants of saints' hair function as charismatic relics capable of healing the diseased and possessed.⁵⁶ Hagiographers refashion the negative attributes of female bodies—deportment, dress, and hair—into vessels of repentance, with women's charismatic power stemming from the eradication of feminine vice.

The *vitae* of late antique and early medieval holy women therefore popularize the theology of the cosmetic that was promulgated by both sacred scripture and patristic discourse. Because female apparel had traditionally associated women with spiritual apostasy, churchmen designed

appropriate ascetic attire that would immediately signify the alienation of these special women from the transgressions of their sex. The hagiographical rewriting of female dress transforms the self-indulgent daughters of Eve into the repentant daughters of Zion.

Biblical Spinning and Serving Women

Patristic, monastic, and hagiographical writers also appropriate the image of the chaste, charitable spinning woman from Hebrew, Christian, and even classical sacred discourse as symbols of women saints' virginal purity. Spinning is linked intimately with charity and ritualistic piety and, in the Hebrew Bible, the virtue of spinning women serves as a contrast to the depravity and apostasy of adorned women. The book of Proverbs (31.10–31) defines the ideal woman: "She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. . . . She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches to the needy." In Exodus (35.25–26), women "who have the ability to spin with their hands" make "spin offerings" to Yahweh. The Christian compiler of Acts judges a woman's worth by the beauty of her clothwork. In Acts (9.36–41) the apostle Peter resurrects a charitable widow named Tabitha after her friends had displayed before him the exquisite tunics and garments she had woven.

The Hebrew and Christian Bibles also glorify women who serve or patronize holy men. In 1 Kings (17.9–16) Yahweh commands a pious widow to feed and serve Elijah and, in return, the prophet multiplies her grain and oil. The synoptic gospels recount Jesus' resurrection of Peter's mother-in-law, who immediately upon rising waits upon the men (Mark 1.29–31; Matthew 8.14–15; Luke 4.38–39). In both instances, women who serve men are the recipients of divine gifts. Luke uses Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus who dispenses food and drink to Jesus and the apostles (Luke 10.38–42), as the paradigm of women's service to men. Both the books of Luke and Acts praise a number of women who finance the missionary movement and offer their households as shelters to the neophyte community. Sacred scripture and classical discourse formulate female spirituality through the images of domesticity and spinning.

In classical literature, spinning and working wool signify a woman's chastity, charity, and femininity.⁵⁷ Neither masculinized women, such as the Amazons, nor virile male citizens worked cloth.⁵⁸ The Hebrew and Christian Bibles similarly assign gender-specific work. The division of the labor, as recorded in Genesis (3.16–19) and the gospel of Matthew (6.28),

is that men shall toil and women shall spin. Like cross-dressing, transposing work roles results in ritual impurity. In 2 Samuel (3.29), King David curses the house of Jo'ab by proclaiming that each successive generation will never be without a son who "has a discharge, or who is leprous, or who holds a spindle, or who is slain by the sword, or who lacks bread." Thus the compilers of the Hebrew Bible rank effeminacy, or the transposing of traditional work roles, with oozing diseases, defeat, and starvation. The woman who holds the spindle, however, like the woman who engages in charitable acts or serves holy men, is the exemplar of her sex.

According to patristic writers, the spinning and weaving of virgins signify their fidelity to Christ and their charity to his poor. Tertullian advises holy women to keep their hands busy with spinning at home.⁵⁹ The patristic author Ambrose (c. 340–397) asserts that God had given women the wisdom of textiles. Jerome informs his virgins that spinning and weaving are fundamental components of female spirituality. The Gallo-Roman aristocrat Sidonius of Apollonaris (c. 430–487) agrees that men philosophize and women spin.⁶⁰ Caesarius preaches that the church is like a spinning woman who weaves Christ in a "double cloak" of flesh and divinity.⁶¹ Because patristic discourse embraces both Hebrew and classical rhetorical devices, the church fathers naturally applied the familiar literary image of the chaste, spinning woman to Christian saints. Monastic legislators then converted the theoretical discourse of the virginal spinning matron into ad hoc institutional practice.

Caesarius of Arles devotes several sections of his women's rule to spinning and weaving. The nuns are to spin daily while reading aloud. Significantly, the sister in charge of woolwork holds an office of equal importance to that of the cellarer and porter—the two important offices in the male *regula*. All the nuns produce the cloister's garments, but the Benedictine Rule, the major male *regula* of the sixth century, required monks to purchase vestments elsewhere rather than make them in the monastery.⁶² The significance of this attention to clothwork in female *regulae* is twofold: it points to the historical reality of the convent as a primary producer of liturgical cloth and monastic dress; and the symbolic use of spinning in both monastic *regulae* and in saints' *vitae* reinforces the ancient association of women's piety with clothwork.

A number of famous women saints spin, sew, or weave in order to manifest their charity or charismatic power. A few sacred depictions of male martyrs, however, use working wool or donning female dress as part of a ritualistic humiliation. For example, the life of the male martyr, He-

sychius of Antioch, replicates the Hebrew and classical condemnations of men who spin. This rather unusual martyr is "dressed in a slave's tunic and delivered to the wool workers in a fabric mill to be cruelly ridiculed."⁶³ Other male martyrs, such as Serge and Bacchus, are stripped of their masculine attire and paraded about cities in women's clothing.⁶⁴ In male sacred fiction, cross-dressing or working wool thus appear as ceremonial punishments. In female *vitae*, however, cloth working is a crucial aspect of female piety, and transvestism can serve as an outward indication of spiritual virility.

Many female saints have some connection, however tenuous or insubstantial, with the domestic arts. The desert hermit Piamoun spins flax in her cell when she is not performing her requisite charismatic duties as an anchorite. Even the undomestic and unconventional Mary of Egypt, the harlot-saint, carries a distaff.⁶⁵ Melania the Younger spins cloth in Jerusalem while her husband, Pinian, chops wood in imitation of the evangelical gendered-work directive (Matthew 6.28). The younger Melania also engages in extensive charitable works, as does the ideal woman of Proverbs who spins and extends her hand to the poor.⁶⁶ When Radegund of Poitiers' friend, Bishop Gregory of Tours, comes to her funeral, the nuns show him her spindles and he weeps at the sight of them.⁶⁷ The queen's spindles are so infused with the Holy Spirit that they could expel demons from the cloister.⁶⁸ The Frankish queen Chlotild weaves in silence while she performs miracles.⁶⁹ Frankish women saints also weave and spin ecclesiastical vestments, altar cloths, and altar hangings for the consecrated male hierarchy.⁷⁰ Pious women who spin are connected intimately with both philanthropic acts and service to holy men.

Hagiographical discourse duplicates biblical images of humble serving women. In their *vitae*, late Roman patrician holy women and northern European noble saints of the early Middle Ages disavow their aristocratic origins through their servile demeanor, modest dress, and domestic deeds. The Empress Helena dresses as a humble servant and ministers to nuns at table.⁷¹ Melania the Elder dons a slave's hood and waits upon important churchmen.⁷² In their lives, the Theodosian empresses humanize the public image of the imperial family by clothing the poor, working in soup kitchens, and washing dishes.⁷³ The holy women of the Frankish aristocracy imitate the philanthropic deeds of the late Roman empresses. Radegund of Poitiers ministers to lepers, the poor, and the diseased. She cleans churches and waits upon holy men in imitation of Martha's service to Jesus and the apostles.⁷⁴ In the life of Martin of Tours, Maximas, the wife of a

Roman official, emulates Mary Magdalene's repentance by drenching the Christ-like Martin's feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. She also imitates the pious service of Martha by making dinner for the bishop of Tours, mixing his drink with her own hand and collecting the crumbs after he had finished.⁷⁵ Other holy women, such as the Frankish Austreberta, display their obedience to God by baking bread.⁷⁶ In Frankish Gaul, the domestic service motif culminates in the archetypal housekeeping saint who cooks, spins cloth, washes the feet of the poor, and nurses the sick.⁷⁷

The refashioned images of late Roman and early medieval aristocratic women also include their replicating evangelical women's financial patronage of the institution of the church. In both Luke and Acts, wealthy women finance and shelter the neophyte missionary movement and the early Christian community. In Acts (16.14–15), Lydia, a merchant-woman, offers her residence to the apostles as a refuge. In imitation of wealthy, evangelical women such as Lydia, late antique patricians serve as ecclesiastical benefactors by building churches, funding male careers, and dispensing alms. Early medieval holy women simulate the universal patronage of the late Roman patricians albeit on a more provincial level. Frankish women establish monasteries, decorate altars, and finance local episcopal politics. But like the women of Galilee who witness holy events from a distance (Matthew 27.55), the spirituality of early medieval holy women remains supplemental to that of important male saints. Female saints support the consecrated hierarchy of the church as humble servants who remain outside the closed circle of male power.

Biblical Women as Simple Faith

Spinning, service, and patronage are integral facets of the ascetic lives of late antique and early medieval female saints, and these feminine virtues replicate the charity and piety of women in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Biblical representation of repentant females personifying a simple faith in God is also repeated in lives of women saints. A favorite motif of evangelical authors is to castigate the rational intellect of the male apostles by promoting the simple faith of women whose belief in Christ is stronger than that of the men (Mark 5.25–34, 7.24–30; Matthew 9.20–26, 15.22–28; Luke 8.43–48; John 11.1–3, 20–44). Because ancient theology associated women with the irrational and emotional, they were the perfect metaphorical representations of the purest faith in God. Faith in God, according to the apostle Paul, stands in opposition to reliance on human knowledge:

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1.20). Paul uses the rhetoric of inversion to admonish those who rely on wondrous signs or philosophy to believe in God (1 Corinthians 1.22). He proclaims that "the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2.14). Only those who become "fools for Christ's sake" can achieve divine wisdom. In this perspective, women's irrational psyches made them ideal "fools for Christ."

Evangelical authors use the simple faith of women who believe in Christ as a foil to the apostles who often demand "signs and philosophy." The synoptic gospels recount the famous story of the woman who touches the fringes of Christ's garments and is healed immediately of an "issue of blood" (Mark 5.25–34; Matthew 9.20–26; Luke 8.43–48). This healing is an act of inclusion because Christ violates Hebrew purity laws by curing a hemorrhaging woman (Leviticus 15.25–30), considered a social pariah because she transferred her uncleanness to anyone or anything she touched, to skin, clothing, bedding, and entire households. Indeed the Bible designates all humans who ooze—lepers, menstruating women, and men who discharge matter—as unclean (Leviticus 12–15). After Jesus heals the woman who had suffered for twelve years from an issue of blood, he resurrects a twelve-year-old girl (Mark 5.42). In Luke, Jesus straightens the body of a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years (13.11–13). Jesus' healings of a menstruating woman, a young girl at the onset of menstruation, and a postmenopausal woman signify the universal restoration of the female life cycle.⁷⁸

Jesus' metaphorical healing of a *hemorrhissa* communicates the important spiritual messages of the power of faith. The gospel of Mark states that the woman had sought the healing powers of doctors and had spent all her money seeking a cure. Yet Jesus restores the unclean woman: "And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, 'who touched my garments?'" The male apostles challenge Jesus: "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" (Mark 5.31). The trembling woman, however, approaches Jesus and prostrates herself before him. Jesus instructs her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mark 5.34). Jesus shows no fear that the bleeding woman has transferred her uncleanness to his garments. He ignores the male apostles who question his authority. The gospel thus asserts that the power of faith overcomes all earthly healing arts. The unclean

woman personifies pure faith in God and, although she is outside the ritual boundaries of the Law, she is a recipient of the divine gift of healing. Her simple faith rivals that of a male apostle, who distrusted the charismatic abilities of Jesus: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14.31).

Sinful or idolatrous women in the gospels are sometimes represented as the human manifestation of pristine faith in Christ. In Matthew (15.22–28) a woman implores Jesus to exorcise her possessed daughter. She is a Canaanite and therefore an idolater and enemy of the Jews; like the hemorrhaging woman, she lives outside the ritual confines of the Law. The apostles, annoyed by the woman's pleading, beg Jesus to send her away, but he heals the daughter in response to the simple faith of the mother. The significance of the event parallels that of the healing of the woman with an issue of blood. The Canaanite woman believes in the Messiah more strongly than do the apostles who instinctively dismiss her plea. The gospel of Mark (7.26–30) repeats the story but designates a Syrophoenician woman as the zealous gentile convert. Finally in John (4.7–30), Jesus converts an unnamed Samaritan woman not by performing an exorcism but by speaking with her in public. In Ravenna, sixth-century mosaicists chose to depict the meeting between Jesus and the woman of Samaria (Figure 1).

Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at a watering well, where he asks her for a drink. She responds: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." Jesus reveals his supernatural clairvoyance by commanding her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." She answers, "I have no husband." Jesus responds, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband." The woman then recognizes the Son of God: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4.18). At this point in the narrative, the apostles approach Jesus and ask him why he is speaking to a woman. The Samaritan woman goes out among her people to announce the coming of the Messiah. Early Christian writers regarded this woman as the first missionary to the gentiles.⁷⁹ The evangelical presentation of Christ's conversion of women—even adulteresses—created a powerful, enduring prototype for the spiritual powers of repentance and obedience.⁸⁰

The conversion of the Samaritan, Syrophoenician, and Canaanite women affirms Jesus' embrace of the excluded, the triumph of divine healing over earthly medicine, and the vacillating faith of the male apostles.



Figure 1. Woman of Samaria at the well. Sixth-century mosaic. S. Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

These gospel stories represent pure faith in God through the conversion of women who believe in the Messiah when the male apostles doubt. The metamorphosis of sinful, polluted women into contrite vessels of faith represents the possibility of the redemption of universal humanity, for if defiled women can become apostles of God then salvation is open to everyone. The authors of the gospels employ the rhetoric of inversion to remind male audiences that faith depends on submission and repentance, that is, on qualities closely associated with the simple faith of the female. The evangelists represent the male intellect as a “stumbling block” to faith. Feminine belief in divine power is the mirror-opposite of masculine reason.

Because women represent faith in Christ, they also personify belief in his resurrection. The anointing of Jesus by a woman is the most significant foreshadowing of his crucifixion in the gospels (Matthew 26.6–13; Mark 14.3–9; Luke 7.37–50; John 12.1–8). She enters the male banqueting room with unbound hair, a style favored by prostitutes of the time. She wipes the feet of Jesus with her hair and anoints him with ointment from an ala-

baster flask, entreating him to forgive her sins. In two of the gospels the anointing takes place in the house of a leper. In Luke (7.39), the event occurs in the house of a Pharisee who is scandalized that Jesus would allow a sinful woman to anoint him: "If this man [Jesus] were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." Jesus, however, rebukes the legalistic Pharisee for being less hospitable than the contrite woman: "I entered this your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair" (Luke 7.44). In the Mark (14.6–7) and Matthew (26.10–11) versions of the story, the male disciples question Jesus for allowing the woman to waste three hundred denarii's worth of oil. Jesus reprimands the men: "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me." He then acknowledges the act as a prophetic sign of his burial and immortalizes the symbolic actions of the woman by stating that the gospel shall be preached in all nations "in memory of her."⁸¹ He admonishes the men at the table for both their inhospitality and their inability to comprehend the eschatological significance of the contrite woman's deed.

Such anointing also foreshadows the role of women at Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, as does the account of Lazarus in John (11.1–44). This text also parallels Jesus' healing of defiled women inasmuch as Hebrew purity laws decreed that dead bodies pollute those who come into contact with them: "He who touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days" (Numbers 19.11). In John, Jesus resurrects Lazarus who had been dead for four days. The number of days is revealing because the ancient Hebrews believed that the soul lingered over the body for three days before departing the earth.⁸² The mourners had entombed Lazarus in a cave that is reminiscent of Christ's own sepulcher, with a huge stone blocking the entrance. Jesus enters the cave where there is no odor of death and raises the dead man. He performs this miracle because Lazarus's sister, Martha, acknowledges him as the Messiah: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." Both Martha and Mary, who represent active and contemplative spirituality, possess a steadfast faith in the Son of God. Their mourning for Lazarus and their subsequent faith in Christ's ability to revive him portend the symbolic function of women at the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.⁸³

Women representing simple faith are the principle actors in the story of the crucifixion and resurrection. Mourning women dominate these crucial theological passages of the New Testament both because of their

ancient cultural role as the anointers and custodians of dead bodies and because of the evangelical motif of inversion. All the gospels mention the women who stood at the cross (Matthew 27.55–56; Mark 15.40–41; Luke 23.49; John 19.25–27). In John (20.11–18), Mary Magdalene is the first witness of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome prepare to anoint the body of the dead Jesus with spices and ointments (Mark 16.1; Luke 23.55–24.1; Matthew 28.1), but angels command the women to announce the resurrection of Christ to the male apostles. In Mark (16.9–11) and Luke (24.10–11), the male disciples refuse to believe that the resurrected Christ appeared first to Mary Magdalene and the other women. Christ later castigates males for their spiritual vacillation: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24.25). The spiritual message of the crucifixion and resurrection passages repeats the motif of inversion from the *vita Christi*, that women represent faith because they are the incarnations of simplicity and emotion. Sinful women, such as Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman, underscore the possibility of redemption for all of humanity; Christ’s choosing to appear to a contrite sinner, Mary Magdalene, further emphasizes the hope of universal salvation. The dead Christ thus extends his special relationship with the female sex that he had initiated during his life and ministry.

Patristic and hagiographical texts accentuate the singular association between the crucified Christ and repentant women. Augustine praises the women who stood at the cross because their devotion to Christ’s body represents perfect faith in God and the resurrection.⁸⁴ Hagiographical *vitae* similarly stress the theological importance of the faithful women of the New Testament and the symbolic connection of these women with the dead body of Christ. Pious female pilgrims to the Holy Land sought out the places associated with the faithful women of the Bible. The early fifth-century traveler Egeria stood on the spot where the angel announced the resurrection to the holy women.⁸⁵ Melania the Younger stayed at the martyrion of Saint Phocas because it was reputed to be home of the faithful Canaanite woman of Matthew (15.22–28).⁸⁶ Paula visited the Holy Sepulcher and, in an ecstatic frenzy, rolled on the stone floor and licked the rocks on which the Lord’s dead body had lain.⁸⁷ In numerous ways, the sacred biographies of women elevate their subjects to the status of the evangelical female custodians of the crucifixion.

Female saints, according to their *vitae*, procure relics of the true cross to manifest their special relationship with the crucified Christ. According to a late-fourth-century sacred fiction, the Augusta Helena, mother of

Constantine, discovered the wood of the true cross in Jerusalem.⁸⁸ Two centuries later, the Frankish queen Radegund obtained similar relics for her cloister at Poitiers.⁸⁹ Melania the Elder received from the bishop of Jerusalem a fragment of the *lignum crucis*, something which Macrina, the sister of Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, wore around her neck.⁹⁰ The Frankish holy woman Rusticula always carried a piece of the cross with her, and she rededicated to the holy cross a church that had previously been consecrated to the militant archangel, Michael.⁹¹ Female saints frequent the places where biblical women manifested their simple faith, and they care for the material remains of Christ's death. Similarly, they mourn the deaths of contemporary Christ-like holy men, prepare their bodies for death, and safeguard their relics.⁹² They also care for male shrines, as when the Frankish holy woman Ingtrude regularly washed the tomb of Saint Martin.⁹³ Although women's care for the dead was part of their larger, pre-Christian role as custodians of familial memory,⁹⁴ the hagiographical depiction of female saints who nurture the dead bodies of holy men is evocative of the biblical portrait of the contrite women who prepared Christ's corpse for burial.⁹⁵

Hebrew and Christian scriptures create a twofold image of sacred gender. On the one hand, spiritual women personify unwavering faith, active service, and repentance. On the other hand, depraved women represent alienation from God, carnal vice, and deceit. In Hebrew discourse, the elaborate ornamentation of female bodies symbolizes humankind's unfaithfulness. Pauline and patristic writings on female appearance and demeanor adopt the Hebrew metaphor of adorned women as vessels of sin, and contrite, austere female bodies as vessels of redemption. The patristic theology of the cosmetic distinctively fuses the Hebrew image of the painted woman with the Stoic doctrine of self-presentation as the outward unveiling of interior piety or depravity. Late antique and early medieval conciliar, monastic, and hagiographical sources foster both the Pauline and patristic proscriptions concerning the female body and public behavior. Veiled, repentant, somber women manifest absolute submission to divine authority. Hebrew and Christian scripture also link women's chastity and piety with spinning and charity. In creating archetypal representations of female sanctity, patristic, monastic, and hagiographical sources similarly embrace the charitable, spinning woman of Proverbs, the domestic female servant of the gospels, and the women in Acts who finance and house the apostles.

The evangelists likewise portray Christ's conversion of polluted and idolatrous women to proclaim the possibility of salvation for sinful humanity as a whole. Women's sacred biographies further depict the conversion of their heroines to the life of radical self-denial as a proof-text of ecumenical redemption. Finally, repentant women share a singular relationship with the crucified Christ; they are the custodians of his dead body and the principal mourners of his passion. Hagiographical *vitae* stress this special alliance by linking female saints with relics of the passion and by depicting women's pilgrimages to the Holy Land and their mystical apprehension of the events leading to the passion and resurrection. Roman and Frankish women nurture the bodies of Christ-like holy men and serve as caretakers of male tombs. At the same time, and perhaps in reaction to the exaltation of female qualities and deeds, representations of masculine spirituality positioned female sanctity as disparate from and subordinate to male authority.

The Rhetorical Uses of Clothing in the Lives of Sacred Males

IN THE HEBREW BIBLE, GOD SENDS Ezekiel a vision about the dangers of consecrated, symbolic vestments. Yahweh instructs the prophet that “when they [the Hebrew priests] go out into the outer court to the people, they shall put off the garments in which they have been ministering, and lay them in the holy chambers; and they shall put on other garments, lest they communicate their holiness to the people with their garments” (Ezekiel 44.19).¹ The warning is conveyed that the clothing of the Hebrew priesthood, the sole reserve of the inner sanctum of the Temple and the altar, should not be visible in profane spaces. Hebrew sacred discourse contains meticulous descriptions of the ceremonial dress of male altar servants. The books of Exodus, 1 Kings, and Ezekiel include detailed regulations concerning the sanctification of material objects and the consecration of those who wear or carry them. Linen coats, turbans, caps, breeches, girdles, and the embroidered ephod comprise the most important material embodiments of the spiritual authority of the sanctified Hebrew priesthood. The intricate ephod, the jeweled breastplate, the urim and thummim (the sacred lots carried in the pouches of the breastplate), and the ceremonial headpiece signify the power of priestly intercession, Temple sanctification, and altar officiation (Exodus 28ff, 39.1ff; 1 Samuel 2.28; 2 Samuel 6.14; Ezekiel 21.26; Zechariah 3.5). Yahweh consecrates the Hebrew sacrificial table and all those who come in contact with it (Exodus 29.37), but divine power destroys those men who approach the hallowed space without wearing the proper ritual clothing (Exodus 28.43). The Temple precinct similarly requires the donning of appropriate sacred vestments and the cutting of the hair in a symbolic fashion (Ezekiel 44).

In contrast, the Christian scriptures offer very little information on the outward appearance of Jesus and his disciples. They wear the common attire of the Mediterranean—sandals, seamless shirts, and mantles (John

19.23; Acts 12.8). The simple clothing of the Son of God and his male votaries inverts the ritualized garments of the consecrated Hebrew priesthood. The charismatic power of these second-covenant holy men emanates from bodily and spiritual purity, not from altar status. The late antique Christian hierarchy, however, gradually transformed the simple, apostolic tunics of the gospels and Acts into a complex, ritualistic assortment of vestments that physically embodied the unique powers (*charismata*) of Christian altar servants and through which masculine sacred gender was constructed. Male garments increasingly represented the special status of hallowed men who dutifully served at the Christian sacrificial table. Whereas female metaphorical clothing personified repentance and submission, ritualistic male dress signified *charismata* and institutional authority.

Biblical Sacred Dress

In the Hebrew Bible, the adornment of women's bodies exemplifies the spiritual chasm between apostate humankind and the divine, while the elaborate ornamentation of the bodies of male priests represents divine consecration and power.² Late antique and early medieval ecclesiastical sources suggest that Christian writers appropriated Hebrew images of sacred space and objects. Jerome in his commentary on Ezekiel 44 advises the adoption of special, pure garments by those who hold the sacraments.³ Early medieval church councils describe the Christian altar as the Holy of Holies.⁴ Specific canons compare the Christian clerical tonsure with the unique hairstyle of Levite priests and claim that the lower clergy who carry enthroned bishops to mass are like the Levites who bore the Ark of the Covenant on their backs.⁵ Hebrew discourse therefore contributed to the later Christian display of consecrated power through metaphorical clothing and hallowed objects.⁶

In Exodus (28.4), Yahweh instructs the Israelites to make for the male priests "a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a girdle." The Lord continues to specify the colors, fabrics, embroidery, engravings, jewels, and shape of each garment. The ephod and the breastplate both symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. Aaron and his sons are to wear these symbolic garments when they "go into the holy place" and serve as priests (Exodus 28.5ff). The blue robe of the ephod was decorated with golden bells which safeguarded the priest from demons. The headpiece was engraved with the signet "Holy to the Lord" (Exodus 28.36). Yahweh warns that those priests who do not wear consecrated vest-

ments when they approach the altar shall “bring guilt upon themselves and die” (Exodus 28.43); hence, access to the sacred space surrounding the sacrificial table demanded highly ritualized costume.

The consecration of the bodies of Levite priests involves sacrificing animals, anointing the head with oil and garments with blood and oil (Exodus 29.7ff). Priests must perform ritual ablutions before they approach the holy altar (Exodus 29.4, 40.30–32). Yahweh also stipulates the size, decoration, and building materials of the Hebrew sacrificial table (Exodus 30.1ff). Sanctification of the altar is similar to the consecration of priestly vestments. Once sanctified through the ritual offerings, anything that touches the altar becomes holy (Exodus 29.37). Finally, Yahweh proclaims the uniqueness of priestly consecration: “This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It shall not be poured upon the bodies of ordinary men” (Exodus 30.31–32). Anyone who attempts to emulate the sacred process of consecration and anoints an outsider “shall be cut off from his people” (Exodus 30.33).

Yahweh also consecrates the Temple built by King Solomon and reveals the heavenly dimensions of the second Temple to the prophet Ezekiel (1 Kings 9.3; Ezekiel 40.5ff). Divine revelation provides the prophet with detailed instructions for maintenance of the sacred space of the inner sanctum and the altar (Ezekiel 43.18). The book of Ezekiel (43ff) uses the mediums of sacred space, vestments, and hairstyles to identify individuals who are ritually pure or impure. After describing a series of ritual cleansings of the altar, God instructs Ezekiel that the uncircumcised and aliens will be excluded from the holy place. God commands the Israelites to separate themselves from the gentiles by trimming their hair in ritualistic fashion (Leviticus 19.27; Jeremiah 9.26; Ezekiel 44.20). Yahweh also stipulates the fabrics, garments, hairstyles, and sexual status of the priests who enter the sacred space of the altar. Special garments of linen are to be worn in the inner court, and wool is prohibited there.⁷ When priests return to greet the laity in the outer court, they are to remove the sacred linen garments, which are only for use in the inner sanctum (Ezekiel 44.19). Hebrew scripture thus formulates the intricate process of sanctifying material objects and consecrating the men who wear or employ them. According to Exodus (29.21), the Hebrew priest and his garments “shall be holy.” Christianity accepts this legacy while rejecting the commandment that priestly consecration “shall not be poured upon the bodies of ordinary men” (Exodus 30.31–32).

In the Christian scriptures, rebellious second-covenant holy men don

the simple dress of Palestine. The clothing of the apostles is not sanctified through rituals—God consecrates material objects through the agency of the pristine bodies of Christ’s spiritual brotherhood: “And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them” (Acts 19.11–12). Ceremonial costume does not reveal the spiritual prowess of the apostle Paul; rather, Paul’s modestly clad body itself is “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12.1), thereby radiating divine power. The humble garments of Jesus and the apostles comply with God’s commandment that consecrated men should not reveal their holiness to the laity through their sacred garb (Ezekiel 44.19). The self-presentation of Christ’s votaries is that of humble travelers, as Jesus commands in Matthew (10.9), “take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff.” The charismatic beggars of the Savior are to be “like men sentenced to death . . . ill-clad, and buffeted and homeless” (1 Corinthians 4.8, 11). Christ’s itinerant preachers are the moving icons of a new spiritual order. The gospels present them as seeking to invert the priestly hierarchy which (under the old dispensation) displayed itself to the world in an elaborate dress peculiar to its mission. Apostolic clothing is part of the larger rhetorical strategy of inversion; homeless beggars who had been social outcasts are transformed into chosen vehicles of divine power.⁸ Nowhere in Christian scripture is there a portrait of ritualized apparel akin to the lavish description of the costume of Hebrew priests. The most specific depiction of evangelical garments is that of John the Baptist, who wears Elijah’s camel-hair mantle and leather girdle (Mark 1.6). John’s prophetic dress validates Christianity’s descent from the charismatic heroes of Hebrew scripture, for the Baptist is the “New Elijah” of the second covenant. Detailed physical descriptions of Jesus of Nazareth, however, are strikingly absent from the gospels.⁹ Jesus is portrayed in terms of what he is to become, not in his mundane reality: “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” (Matthew 17.1–8; Mark 9.2–9; Luke 9.28–36). This sublime portrait, however, reveals only the eschatological physiognomy of the Son of God. Jesus’ earthly ignominious dress is yet another indication both of the insignificance of this world and the looming eschaton which will eradicate human-made structures.

A handful of textual clues concerning the earthly image of Jesus and the apostles are, however, given. Jesus’ outward demeanor is that of a

simple traveler who does not stand out in a crowd (Luke 24.13–31). He wears a seamless shirt and modest vestments (John 19.23). During the trial, Herod clothes Jesus in “gorgeous apparel” as a mocking gesture to the Son of God who wears the humble dress of the common people (Luke 23.11). Likewise, the Roman soldiers reclothe Christ in a purple cloak and crown him with thorns to ridicule his insignificant stature and presumed ambition (Mark 15.17). Like Jesus, the apostles dress in the everyday mantles and sandals of the Mediterranean (Acts 12.8).

The predominant fabric of the gospels is linen, which symbolizes Christ’s resurrection: “Then Simon Peter . . . went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself” (John 20.6–7). Christ abandoned the linen wrappings as evidence of his resurrection, and, like Elijah, he cast off his earthly raiment before entering paradise. In Hebrew scripture, linen is the consecrated fabric of the Temple; in the gospels, it represents bodily purity, righteousness, and resurrection: “The armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure” (Revelation 19.14). Unstained linen is, according to Christian scripture, ocular proof of sanctity: “Fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (Revelation 19.8). Linen is thus the unceremonial fabric of those who have transformed their bodies themselves into “living sacrifices.”

The elaborate ornamentation of male bodies in Exodus and Ezekiel evokes the separate and unique status of those who stand by the sacrificial table at the Temple. The common dress of Jesus’ disciples, however, inverts the decorative garb of the Levites. Jesus’ followers appear as ordinary members of the human communities they serve. Their uniqueness stems not from ritual garments but from unblemished spirituality. In later generations, this recasting of the appropriate clothing for holy men would become the basis for a male theology of the cosmetic that helped validate Christianity within the late Roman world.

The Male Theology of the Cosmetic

Jerome used his “reclathed” aristocratic friend, Pammachius, as the herald of the infiltration of charismatic power within the somber precinct of the Senate. Pammachius dresses in the toga (*toga pulla*) of the mourning or ignoble to signify his connection with the otherworldly authority of apostolic men, and he violates the inner sanctum of Roman power by wearing inappropriate dress. Jerome contrasts the symbolic garment of the empire,

the toga, with the austere, sordid garb of Christian ascetics in order to dismantle the varied political functions of the secular garment. The imperial Roman toga was a ceremonial dress that designated the status of the public person. Only Roman citizens could wear the toga, which gave Roman political ideals of *dignitas*, *gravitas*, and *respublica* visible expression. The woolen toga was used as a swaddling cloth, a blanket, and a shroud. The *toga pulla* (the dark-wool toga) was a mourning garment. Young, free-born boys wore a toga with a red border and a special amulet, the *bullae*, which signified that these youths were “off-limits for sex.”¹⁰ Adolescent boys donned the *toga virilis* as a sign of their manhood. Men and female prostitutes wore the short toga. Proper women and elderly men used the long toga. Those who were generally regarded as “effeminate” wore the *toga vitrea*, or the “transparent toga,” which resembled the diaphanous short togas of female prostitutes. Candidates for political office put on the *toga candida* (the white toga). Senators wore a special imperial toga with a purple border in the Senate.¹¹ Roman law regulated the public dress of senators, and any senator who disobeyed the clothing ordinances was expelled from his office.¹² Clothing had to display the social, political, and economic status of the wearer because improper dress could potentially pollute Rome.

Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* discusses the public and political charisma of the “*virī boni et gravis auctoritatem*.”¹³ The political toga, according to the first-century rhetorician, is part of the rhetorical performance of powerful Roman males, who therefore need instruction on the proper display of stately dress.¹⁴ A well-trained politician throws the togas over his shoulder and gestures with his left hand as he paces back and forth speaking.¹⁵ Quintilian specifies the amount of jewelry to be worn by dignified politicians, the manner in which they should hold their hands, and the proper length of the toga for various elements of Roman society: long togas for women, medium-length for senators, and shorter ones for centurions. Those men who improperly veil their bodies in public could potentially be accused of effeminacy or madness.¹⁶ Proper use of the toga in Roman political life therefore proclaims both the somber *dignitas* of public men and the honor of service for the Roman *respublica*.

The enormous significance that the Romans attributed to the symbolism of clothing helps explain Tertullian’s attraction to the subject of Christian male dress. Although most church fathers were preoccupied with prescribing the appropriate dress of holy women, Tertullian, the great theologian of the Christian cosmetic, launched a polemic that proclaimed

the spiritual benefits of the Christian mantle over the toga of politics. Tertullian's *De Pallio*, written in the early third century, is a flamboyant piece that mocks the political and rhetorical uses of the Roman toga as established by Quintilian.¹⁷ The Christian *pallium* (Greek *himation*) was derived from the rectangular long tunics and cloaks that had been the simple dress of nonpolitical persons.¹⁸ The fourth-century council of Gangra acknowledged that philosophers had worn *pallia* to display their contempt for the world, and early church writers recognized this modest garment as the evangelical dress of Christ and the apostles.¹⁹ Tertullian declares that the Roman toga, which is complicated to interpret and burdensome to wear, has been superseded by the humble dress of Christian holy men. He ridicules Quintilian's meticulous instructions concerning the proper vestment of the political body: the throwing of the toga over the appropriate shoulder, the constant rearranging of its many folds, the girding of the body underneath, and the lengthy time spent in donning the voluminous garment.²⁰ In contrast, the ascetic's *pallium* is simply thrown over the body. Tertullian asserts that the *pallium* had become the *signum* of Christianity, the "new philosophy" of the world.

Both Tertullian's *De Pallio* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* employ the Stoic belief that the self-presentation of potent men should parallel their interior virtue. The Stoics were divided over what form that self-presentation should take.²¹ On the one hand, certain Stoic philosophers, such as Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, argued that a man must not tamper with his natural appearance by adopting varied styles of dress and hair, but should allow his hair and beard to grow long in accordance with nature. On the other hand, Seneca reasoned that the cultivation of an undomesticated appearance may be only a ruse for getting attention.²² Men should comply with conventional rules concerning dress and hairstyles, but that they should not go too far in following tonsorial customs. Seneca thus denounced those Roman patricians who plucked the hair off of their legs, arms, and groins, because depilation of bodily hair was the fashion of effeminates and male prostitutes. Urging moderation for the Roman public man, Seneca warned that excessive tonsorial concern would place a senator beyond the political pale, while an unkempt, feral appearance would hinder the public duty of the Stoic philosopher because it would alienate his intended audience.

Both the Stoic philosophy and Christian male theology of the cosmetic connect self-presentation with political and charismatic power. Tertullian's *De Pallio* follows the Stoic thought of Musonius and Epictetus in

that his treatise champions unaffected masculinity over the elaborate dress code of Roman politicians. Early Christian ascetics donned humble, apostolic dress and allowed their hair and beards to grow long as outward *signa* of their contempt for the world and its hierarchies. In the Christian cosmetic, an uncivilized appearance conveyed miraculous power and spiritual authority.

The Sanctification of Material Objects and Altar Vestments

The late antique church veered from the simplicity of this early Christian ideal and gradually embellished the bodies of male priests in order to display the unique relationship between altar servants and the divine. Between the third and seventh centuries, conciliar and papal legislation indicate that the ecclesiastical hierarchy created its own form of institutional dress. The late antique and early medieval episcopacy increased the frequency of legislative church councils in both the East and the West to address a host of issues, including sexuality and sacred clothing. The legislation of these various councils is difficult to interpret because it was piecemeal, localized, and inconsistently applied.²³ It is possible, however, to discern a consistent episcopal ambition to create a sacred space around the altar. In Exodus and Leviticus, Yahweh endowed the Hebrew sacrificial table with the power to sanctify humans and objects; Christians modeled their conception of their altar on the hallowed workings of its Hebrew forerunner described in Exodus and Leviticus.

Christian bishops transformed the altar from a wooden eucharistic table into a stone sacrificial table embellished with gold, silks, and saints' relics and covered by a lavish ciborium.²⁴ In Gaul, church councils required that the altar be anointed with chrism and blessed, that it be made of stone, that relics be placed in it, and that the *corpus Domini* be positioned correctly on it.²⁵ Bishops condemned altars that had been used by heretics or consecrated by excommunicated priests.²⁶ Canons regulated the lower clergy's access to space around the altar and the altar vessels.²⁷ As early as the sixth century, altar railings separated the laity from the consecrated clergy during the celebration of vigils and mass.²⁸

Late antique theorists of sacred space equated linen altarcloths (*pallia*) with Christ's shroud because, like the shroud, the *pallia* covered the Christ crucified, who was personified by the sacrificial table.²⁹ By the end of the early medieval period, the altar was linked with the physical body and blood of Christ while the *pallia* represented Christ's mystical body or

the Church. The *Liber Pontificalis* records the increasing ornamentation of the “gold and silver-wrought” *pallia*.³⁰ Because altar *pallia* served the function of covering the body of Christ crucified, bishops outlawed the practice of wrapping ordinary corpses in them.³¹ The Christian altar, like its ancient Hebrew prototype, sanctified all objects that came into contact with it.

Bishops reserved for themselves the special privilege of consecrating objects connected with the celebration of the eucharist. During the early Middle Ages, service chalices (*calices ministeriales*), censers, patens, and the pyx evolved as distinctive liturgical instruments. Bishops used a special oil (*oleum exorcidiatum*) to exorcise demoniacs and special water basins (*aqualmanile*) to wash their hands after they anointed babies at baptism.³² They distributed consecrated pieces of bread (*fermenta*) throughout their districts in order to unify the churches under their control. Bishops decreed that no consecrated vessels were to be used for profane purposes and that non-consecrated ministers were forbidden to touch the hallowed objects.³³ Similarly, bishops banned the use of church furnishings for wedding celebrations.³⁴

Liturgical furniture also served to separate altar servants from ordinary Christians. Late antique Mediterranean bishops sat on special chairs covered with linen, for linen’s lily-white purity symbolized righteous deeds (Revelation 19.8) and was used in memory of Christ’s burial and resurrection.³⁵ Gallo-Roman bishops sat on thrones (*cathedrae*) in accordance with the legend that Saint Peter had occupied a Roman *cathedra*.³⁶ The *Liber Pontificalis* claims that the first-century pope Clement inherited his *cathedra* directly from Jesus through the apostle Peter.³⁷ The elevated reading desk (*ambo*) magnified the power of the episcopacy, while the highly ornate interiors of cathedrals in Gaul contributed to the solemn ritual performance of the mass.³⁸ They were hallowed spaces, designed to augment and emphasize the eucharistic powers of the priesthood, evoking images of paradise with their dazzling lights, gorgeous hangings, and resplendent decorations.³⁹

The most significant use of material culture to define unique spiritual status was the creation of a specific kind of sacred dress and hairstyle for those who celebrated the eucharist and moved within the sacred spaces of Christian churches. Certain items of ceremonial clothing and objects recalled particular events from the *vita Christi*. The deacon’s *pallium* (*pallium linostinum*) was worn over the left arm as a reminder of the towel with which Jesus had washed his disciples’ feet.⁴⁰ Sixth-century Easter vest-

ments were decorated with linen bands in memory of Christ's burial and resurrection.⁴¹ The late antique papacy gradually began to regulate the garments that were to be used only in liturgical rites. Pope Stephen I (254–257) mandated that priests and deacons should not use their consecrated clothing for ordinary work outside of the church.⁴² Pope Eutychian (274–282) required special dress for burials.⁴³ Pope Silvester (314–335) distinguished between the clothing worn by deacons in the church and that worn by priests and bishops.⁴⁴ The Council of Agde (506) compelled priests to wear vestments, shoes, and even hairstyles that would distinguish them as pristine altar servants.⁴⁵ Such distinctions had become so elaborate by the fourth and fifth centuries that differences between the consecrated and non-consecrated were vividly conveyed by ecclesiastical vestments.

Symbolic dress became the primary way to distinguish rank, and ceremonial vestments themselves developed into the material reflection of the ecclesiastical “ladder of ascent” (*cursus honorum*). Pope Silvester established a complicated hierarchy based on eucharistic status (reader, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, guardian of the martyrs, deacon, priest, and bishop) that is reminiscent of the Roman *cursus honorum*. Subsequent church councils clarified the age and education level required for each clerical office.⁴⁶ During the third and fourth centuries, bishops isolated themselves from the proliferation of minor church officials by claiming apostolic and prophetic descent as well as by creating a distinctive material culture that included dress, furniture, and *signa* of office.⁴⁷ Church councils began to dictate the presentation of rank through symbolic vestments.⁴⁸

The fourth-century Council of Laodicea allowed only the major orders to wear the forerunner to the stole, the *orarium*, although there was a difference between the deacon's *orarium* and the *oraria* of priests and bishops.⁴⁹ The *orarium* of the high clergy was a scarf-like object worn around the neck as an ornament of rank. The deacon's *orarium*, however, was transformed into a linen towel worn over the right shoulder as indicative of the diaconate's service function.⁵⁰ Church councils stipulated that no official below the rank of deacon could put on the *orarium*. In sixth-century Gaul, a council forbade monks to wear *oraria*.⁵¹ Indeed, the increasing distinction between monastic and hierarchichal dress parallels the subordination of the cloister to episcopal power.⁵² Sixth-century bishops announced they would imprison priests who ignored the conciliar decrees and continued to wear secular clothing and carry weapons.⁵³ Ecclesiastical vestments became, like the Roman toga, the outward representation of the rank and piety of public men.

The *pallium* or *himation*, which developed into the paramount ceremonial vestment, eventually became the mark of an archbishop in the early Middle Ages.⁵⁴ Its adoption by the church hierarchy was reinforced by late antique depictions of Christ, the apostles, and even Moses in the *pallium*. A popular cloak worn throughout the Roman Empire, particularly by philosophers and intellectuals, the *pallium* served as a material representation of the motif of inversion embodied in evangelical discourse. This common cloak of the Mediterranean personified both the universal nature of the church and its specific origins among the charismatic poor of Judea. Gradually another type of cloak, the heavy woolen *paenula*, replaced the *pallium* as an ecclesiastical mantle, which was reduced to a circular scarf decorated with six violet crosses.⁵⁵ In this form, the Roman *pallium* lost all connection with its original function as a cloak and became instead a church vestment that represented episcopal authority. By the sixth century, the *pallium* had become a sacred garment, the threads of which were regarded as capable of working miracles.⁵⁶ The Council of Mâcon (585) decreed that archbishops must wear the *pallium* while they recite the mass.⁵⁷ Eventually, all archbishops were required to petition the papacy for the privilege of wearing the *pallium*, which had become the symbolic dress of metropolitan bishops.

Christianity inherited the practice of ritualistic hairstyle from the ancient Hebrews, who had used hair to indicate ritual purity and separation from neighboring religions by developing styles specific to the Hebrew *gens* and to sacred functions of priesthood. Long hair was forbidden in the Temple for trimmed hair signified repentance (Ezekiel 44.20). Consecrated Hebrew priests were not allowed to let their hair hang loose (Leviticus 21.10), and Temple ordinances prohibited men from shaving their heads.

For late antique Christians, the ultimate distinction between the ordained and the ordinary was the tonsure and, by the sixth century, it had become the *signum* of the angelic life for men in the West.⁵⁸ The tonsure first appeared in Rome in the sixth century, sanctioned by Paul's advice on short male hairstyles as well as by popular legends that Peter had been shorn by Christ or had demanded to be tonsured as a sign of his humility.⁵⁹ By the seventh century, the tonsure was such an important symbol of religious status that the Celtic and Roman churches fought over its exact conformation.⁶⁰ In the early-eighth-century life of the Anglo-Saxon bishop Wilfrid of York, a Gallic archbishop cuts the Anglo-Saxon's hair in the form of a tonsure to commemorate "the crown of thorns which encircled the

head of Christ.”⁶¹ Throughout the Middle Ages, the tonsure remained the most striking emblem of masculine religious status, required of any man upon entering the highest ecclesiastical offices.

Early medieval artisans designed special liturgical combs to be used only by altar servants. After a priest or bishop donned his vestments, he combed his hair with the ritual instrument, thereby symbolically reordering the divine cosmos before the act of consecrating the eucharist.⁶² At Durham, the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon ascetic and bishop Cuthbert was buried with a pair of scissors and a comb to commemorate his “eternal tonsure.”⁶³ Hallowed hairstyles, ritualized dress, and liturgical objects therefore served to elevate altar servants from the multitude of ordinary believers and even from unordained holy men.

The outward manifestation of the authority of priests and bishops sheds light on the subtle differences between eastern and western attitudes concerning institutional and extra-institutional power. In the early medieval West, members of the male hierarchy segregated themselves from the laity through symbolic dress and hair. Ritualistic clothing and hair served the western episcopal hierarchy as the outward symbols of apostolic descent and institutional authority against the charismatic power and unregulated dress of individual holy men. In the East, however, the individual charisma of the ascetic remained the model for power and local patronage.⁶⁴

The symbolic meaning of clothing provides an excellent guide for measuring the tension between East and West concerning the role of asceticism and authority. When the iconoclastic Emperor Constantine V (741–775) aspired to usurp the power of the eastern church, he attacked the authority of ascetics who remained outside its institutional hierarchy by stripping them of their unique dress, the monastic *schema*, and by forcing them to put on wedding clothes as a symbol of their reintegration into the world.⁶⁵ Constantine denounced the *schema* because this rough tunic, rather than episcopal office, had imbued the eastern holy man with spiritual authority.⁶⁶ In Italy, however, Byzantines assailed the western church by stripping the *pallium* from the Roman pontiff Silverius (536) and reclothing him in a monastic habit.⁶⁷ This nicely captures the contrasting perspectives toward clothing and authority in Constantinople and Rome: in the East, removal of the monastic *schema* meant the eradication of extra-institutional power whereas in the West donning the monastic habit emasculated the wearer and annihilated his political power.⁶⁸

The western episcopacy successfully absorbed the charismatic dress and persona of the Hebrew prophet and desert ascetic while carefully de-

lineating the hierarchical relationship between ascetic and bishop. As administrative officials, bishops expressed the *vita activa* through charitable acts, missionary work, estate management, and public construction projects.⁶⁹ Simultaneously, their claim to apostolic descent recast them as the heirs of Hebrew prophets and priests, thereby merging their administrative responsibilities with the spiritual prowess of powerful holy men, such as Elijah and Elisha, who had remained outside the traditional Hebrew priesthood. This sacred lineage led to the theological tenet that the Christian bishop had become an earthly conduit to God and a chosen receptacle for the Holy Spirit. Bishops possessed the spiritual gifts of the apostles, such as the ability to discern spirits and to prophesy; they counted the angels among their friends and benefactors; and, by the sixth century, they held the more radical charisms of healing, exorcism, resurrection, and *glossolalia* (1 Corinthians 12).

The Masculinization of Sacred Space

A crucial consequence of this unique melding of bureaucratic and charismatic power was the gradual but decisive marginalization of laymen and all women from sacred space.⁷⁰ Late antique and early medieval bishops curtailed women's access to ecclesiastical offices, male altar servants, liturgical objects, and the altar itself. Laymen and women were required to wash their hands before they entered the sacred space of the church, and women had to wrap their hands in linen cloth before they received the eucharist.⁷¹

A campaign for clerical celibacy in the early medieval West was part of this program. Episcopal councils sought to remove females from proximity to the daily lives of hierarchical men whose virginal status reflected the *imago Dei*. Conciliar legislation repeatedly argued that no woman could share a household with a male member of the major orders. Bishops' wives, or *episcopae*, were the primary targets of sixth-century legislation.⁷² They were required to be celibate themselves, they were expelled from the episcopal hierarchy, and they were not allowed to remarry.⁷³ The language used to describe this refashioned relationship between cleric and wife was that of "brother and sister."⁷⁴ Any transgression of the spiritual kinship between *episcopus* and *episcopa* was defined as incestuous. The Council of Tours (567) ousted all women from the households of men, acknowledging that it was better for clerics to make their own vestments than to allow female "serpents" into their homes.⁷⁵ Eventually this strict separation of non-kinwomen from the major orders filtered down into the minor ones. The uncompromising legislation of the Council of Mâcon (585) required

the wives of members of both the major orders (deacons, priests, and bishops) and the minor orders (subdeacons, acolytes, lecturers, and exorcists) not to remarry after the death of their husbands. If these widows did marry again, they were handed over to a woman's monastery for life.⁷⁶ Thus what began as an attempt to regulate the number of times clerics could see their wives or how many witnesses were required when they spoke to one another ended in a total exclusion of non-blood kin from the living quarters of clerics. Women had to be kept away from clerics because the female sex possessed the power to corrupt sacrificial priests and to defile the body and blood of Christ.⁷⁷

Women who had been admitted to the sacred ministry also became the objects of similar papal and conciliar prohibitions.⁷⁸ Pope Gelasius declared that women who presume to minister at the altar usurp the rightful offices of men.⁷⁹ Merovingian councils abolished the female diaconate, thereby ignoring scriptural precedent and Paul's praise of his own women friends who were deacons. The episcopacy also revoked the pastoral order of widows.⁸⁰ The Gallo-Roman episcopacy stressed that women's delicate nature rendered them unsuitable for even the lowest ranks of the major orders.⁸¹ The repeated attempts to eradicate women's participation in pastoral works reflects the masculinization of the ecclesiastical *cursus honorum* and of the space around the sacrificial table.⁸²

Several councils resolved to remove women from the hallowed space of the altar. The fourth-century Council of Laodicea ordered women not to approach the altar.⁸³ The Council of Tours (567) clearly separated the area around the eucharist from the rest of the church, and stipulated that laymen and women could not approach the area between the *cancelli* and the altar.⁸⁴ The protracted Council of Auxerre (561–605) regulated the liturgical behavior of the clergy and restricted women's access to sanctified objects. The most famous canons prohibited women from receiving the eucharist in their bare hands and from touching the altar cloth (*palla Dominica*).⁸⁵ This policy reinforced a fifth-century papal prohibition on women and nuns touching and washing the *pallium* or placing incense within the sacred space of the church.⁸⁶ Sacred sex segregation influenced the architecture of medieval nunneries, which housed a specialized liturgical space for male priests, the sacristy.⁸⁷ The sanctification of the Christian altar, like its ancient Hebrew prototype, depended on the exclusion of the non-consecrated from the sacred boundaries of the sacrificial table. In addition to the architectural separation of the sexes, there were also gender-based liturgical divisions. Early Christian sources reveal that there existed male and female rites of baptism and exorcism. Ancient baptismal rites for

girls emphasize certain biblical texts, such as the gospel account of Mary Magdalene in the garden with the resurrected Christ.⁸⁸ The Gelasian Sacramentary contains sex-specific blessings for women and men who enter the monastic life and sex-specific prayers of exorcism.⁸⁹ There may have been special sections of churches consecrated for women, such as the *matroneum*.⁹⁰ Architectural historians and archaeologists have theorized that the Byzantine basilica Hagia Sophia reserved the second-floor gallery for women, leaving the ground floor for the men.⁹¹

Hagiographical sources also stress the ritualistic separation of the sexes. The sanctified soil surrounding the pillars of stylite saints functioned similarly to the consecrated space of a church altar. Inasmuch as Symeon Stylites displays his body as that of Christ crucified, his pillar symbolically serves as a kind of sacrificial table. Divine justice, therefore, strikes down women who approach Symeon's figurative pillar-altar.⁹² Other male saints praise women who avoid meeting them in person.⁹³ Saint Augustine, according to his hagiographer, forbade women, including his sister, who was prioress of a convent, from entering his episcopal *domus*.⁹⁴ God miraculously unites the tombs of bishops and their wives whose marriages had remained chaste as a *signum* of their numinous spirituality. Celestial power, however, destroys the wives of bishops and priests who violate conciliar legislation by attempting to seduce their husbands or by penetrating the virginal, masculine space of the episcopal *domus*. Hagiographers manifest the virginal purity of male saints by asserting that demons attack depraved women who audaciously attempt to spend the night in their holy shrines. God miraculously establishes the innocence of bishops who are accused falsely of transgressing their vows of chastity and indicted for fathering children. Gregory of Tours in his *Glory of the Confessors* acknowledges that the wife of one priest broke church law by entering her husband's bed-chamber to defile him. When she crossed the threshold of his holy cell, however, she saw a shimmering *agnus Dei* on his chest, a vision that convinced her to submit to episcopal legislation.⁹⁵ Such sacred fictions furthered conciliar legislation and accentuated the increasing estrangement of the consecrated *servi Dei* from ordinary men and all women.

The Rhetorical Uses of Clothing in the Lives of Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre

As the Christian hierarchy refashioned itself in the *imago Dei* and underscored its distinction from mundane society through symbolic clothing, ritualistic hairstyles, material objects, and sacred space, Gallo-Roman sa-

cred biographies of bishops increasingly stressed the charismatic and anti-institutional origins of the episcopacy. The empowerment of late antique holy men parallels the sanctification of institutional clothing. Two saints' lives, the *vitae* of Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre, demonstrate how clothing was used in popular texts to exemplify the separation of the new Christian administration from its pagan roots as well as the appropriation of ascetic authority by the western episcopacy without the sacrifice of active political power.

The most treasured religious story in medieval France was that of Martin of Tours at the gate of Amiens clothing a beggar by dividing his soldier's cloak (Greek *chlamys*, Latin *paludamentum*), only to discover later that he had bestowed his garment on Christ himself.⁹⁶ This tale was recorded in countless works of medieval and modern art, including altar pieces, embroideries, and reliquaries. Martin's *chlamys* is no ordinary cloak, for it was worn by the most important Roman secular officials, emperors, and military officers, and never by Christian officials.⁹⁷ The *chlamys* is the same kind of garment that Roman soldiers had dressed Jesus in before the crucifixion (Matthew 27.28).⁹⁸ Thus the soldier Martin's reclothing of Christ in the *chlamys* reverses the earlier cruelty of the Romans. Indeed, when Martin returned to camp, his fellow soldiers derided his mutilated garment, as centuries before their pagan counterparts had ridiculed Jesus in his mock *chlamys*.

In his sacred fiction Martin mangles his military dress as a *signum* of his future vocation. As Christ's "reclothed soldier," he renounces physical weapons in favor of supernatural ones, such as the sign of the cross, sackcloth, and ashes. As a bishop with wild hair and a sordid hairy tunic, Martin's physiognomy, miracles, and masculinity recall the prophets, apostles, and desert hermits. His physical presence is so awe-inspiring that, as he travels the roads of Gaul with his "shaggy tunic and black coat . . . swaying to and fro," his charismatic appearance frightens important officials.⁹⁹ Local communities in Gaul identify Martin as an apostle because of his "poverty-stricken clothing."¹⁰⁰ Sulpicius Severus, the saint's hagiographer, describes Martin in such allegorical terms so that his audience would naturally regard the saint as belonging to the same lineage as Elijah, John the Baptist, and the great desert fathers.¹⁰¹

The holy Martin's popular image as a prophet and bishop, promulgated through literary and artistic replicas, marks a transitional period in the history of Christian dress and institutional power. It is highly significant that, even though Martin possesses all the charismatic qualities of a great ascetic, he is nevertheless safely and firmly ensconced within the epis-

copal hierarchy. Sulpicius's *vita* uses clothing to emphasize Martin's break with the secular past through his rejection of official Roman dress, while at the same time the hagiographer portrays Martin as taking on Roman-like public responsibilities as a vigorous pastor, a charitable nurturer, and a local governor. Moreover, by the sixth century Martin's image as a hierarchical servant overshadowed his apostolic charisma; he is described as wearing the garments of a bishop rather than the fetid mantle of an ascetic.¹⁰²

The other important *vita* from late antique Gaul, that of Germanus of Auxerre, portrays the charismatic bishop as heir to apostolic and Hebrew power through the metaphorical use of changed dress. Germanus, like Martin of Tours, renounces his commitment to secular life by transforming his official Roman dress. Germanus's monastic hagiographer, Constantius of Lyons, uses elements of material culture to describe the conversion of this Gallo-Roman lawyer. Like many of the aristocratic male saints of the fifth and sixth centuries, Germanus joined the ecclesiastical hierarchy after having served as governor (*dux*) of a Gallic province. To accentuate Germanus's conversion from a worldly leader to a Christian one, Constantius provides evocative details concerning his dress, furniture, and eating habits. Bishop Germanus wears a hair shirt under his tattered tunic and hooded cloak (*cucullus*), and he sleeps on an "Egyptian" bed made of pieces of sackling spread over rough wooden planks cemented with ashes. He uses his general's cape (*sagulum*) as a blanket.¹⁰³ He never removes his clothes, not even his girdle and shoes, and he always wears a reliquary around his neck. His diet of barley bread made from ashes is more rigorous than that of an ordinary monk.¹⁰⁴ As in the *Vita Martini*, the perversion of official civil dress is a *signum* of ascetic vocation and abrogates the secular past. And, like Martin, the wretchedly dressed Germanus remains a public man who serves as a Christian official, travels as an ecclesiastical diplomat, and establishes official ties with ruling elites in Italy, Gaul, and Britain.

Most hagiographical *vitae* of late antique and early medieval bishops emphasize regenerated power through outward appearance. In his *De Pallio*, Tertullian championed the feral appearance of Christian ascetics over the clothed *dignitas* of Roman politicians. In hagiographical texts, God grants exceptional holy men the right to wear only the "bristles of the body" in imitation of prelapsarian nudity.¹⁰⁵ In Gregory the Great's life of Benedict of Nursia, the papal hagiographer substantiates the cenobite's prophetic charisma by describing Benedict's tenure as an anchorite at Subiaco. According to Gregory, when shepherds discovered the holy man in his cave dressed in skins, they identified him as a wild animal.¹⁰⁶ The didac-

tic message of the passage is clear: before becoming the abbot of a monastery, Benedict had existed on the farthest periphery of society, as had his prototype, Elijah. Gallo-Roman hagiographers claim that Martin's monks at Marmoutier wear Elijah's camel-hair mantles, and they describe future bishops as Hebrew prophets.¹⁰⁷ The physiognomy of celebrants of the holy eucharist mirrors the shining face of the transfigured Christ; ordinary mortals glimpse the Holy Spirit upon the faces of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. When these custodians of Christ's body preach, laymen and women see angels speaking into their ears.¹⁰⁸ Balls of fire ascend from the heads of altar servants, and future holy men are born with tonsures.¹⁰⁹ Early medieval saints' *vitae* both vividly and subtly unite the charisma of uncivilized holy men with western episcopal authority.

Hagiographical discourse also conveys the lesson that local communities should respect the ceremonial dress of consecrated men. Divine power punishes the spiritually depraved who abuse the garments of the episcopacy. Gregory of Tours's *vita* of Bishop Nicetius of Lyons, which contains an unusually detailed description of the ceremonial dress of Merovingian bishops, gives an example of such punishments. After Nicetius's death, an episcopal rival distributed the dead bishop's garments, just as Roman soldiers had divided Christ's clothing. The bishop gave Nicetius's cape (*cappa*), which possessed supernatural power, to a degenerate deacon, who fashioned it into socks for himself. A demon, however, persuaded the deacon to stick his legs in a fire, upon which both the deacon's feet and the sacrilegious socks were consumed.¹¹⁰ Gregory's other hagiographical narratives contain similar incidents of divine retribution for desecration of sacred clothing. For example, five thieves stole hallowed vestments and liturgical vessels from the shrine of Saint Saturninus in Clermont.¹¹¹ Four of the plunderers were killed soon afterward, and God blinded the remaining thief, who eventually returned the holy objects and regained his sight.

Sacred biographers thus instructed Christian audiences in the West that holy hair shirts and altar cloths possessed substantial spiritual power. In focusing on garments and other accoutrements, hagiographical discourse used material culture to draw firm lines that incorporated the repentant in the community and excluded the unrighteous. At the same time, that discourse made it clear that the hierarchy of the church, dressed in symbolic vestments, had the responsibility of supervising all of Christian life.

To change one's condition was to change one's clothes. To renounce profane ambitions and embrace new spiritual obligations called for exterior

signs of inner renewal.¹¹² The lives of Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre employed the motif of changed dress to assert the charismatic origins of the episcopacy. Within a few generations, however, the reality of episcopal dress was very different from Sulpicius Severus's depiction of Martin of Tours as the Gallic Elijah in a hairy mantle. By the fifth century the western hierarchy had constructed a distinctive administrative dress—the *pallium*, *orarium*, *dalmatica*, *paenula*—to embody the responsibilities of the *vita activa*. The piecemeal development of complex liturgical vestments communicated and enhanced the power of those who performed the sacrificial action of the *sancta misteria*. The image of the ceremoniously clad bishop informed western Christian audiences that ascetic power had been subsumed by episcopal authority, while hagiographical accounts demonstrated to them that the institutional power of bishops had roots in the charisma of sacred males. The outward transformation of the bodies of holy men signified the suppression of earthly ambition and the birth of a spiritual power which united the charismatic and the institutional.

The institutional separation of church officials from non-sanctified, ordinary men and all women was manifested by the increasing sanctification of all objects associated with the eucharist and the altar. Individual male ascetics who did not assume public responsibilities, as did Martin and Germanus, were also rigorously excluded from the church hierarchy. Church councils prohibited women's access to offices, objects, and persons sanctified by promixity to the body and blood of Christ. Consecrated things, persons, and spaces were set against those regarded as profane or polluted.¹¹³ This ritual process reflects (and descends from) Hebrew conceptualizations of sacred space that strove to isolate the sacred from the profane. As bishops were increasingly consecrated as "God's anointed" and "virginal administrators," women's authority within the church declined, as did the authority of individual holy men who stood outside the hierarchy.¹¹⁴ Conciliar legislation, monastic *regulae*, liturgical texts, and hagiographical *vitae* contributed to the creation of a unique, male consecrated space that protected virginal men from the temptations of the flesh. Christian priests, like their ancient Hebrew prototypes, became members of an exclusive order distinguished by sacred dress, hairstyle, consecrated objects, and sexual status.

God's Holy Harlots

The Redemptive Lives of Pelagia of Antioch and Mary of Egypt

IN CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE, JESUS, LIKE ELIJAH and Moses before him, purifies himself in the terrifying desert, and the wasteland of Palestine provides the battleground for Christ's warfare with Satan: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came to him" (Matthew 4.1-3).¹ In the Hebrew Bible, Moses sojourns in the deserts of Sinai in order to receive God's written revelation to the Israelites (Exodus 34.28). Elijah renews his spiritual potency in the wilderness around Mount Horeb, where angels nourish him while he rests under a broom tree (1 Kings 19.4-8). John the Baptist, who dresses in the charismatic garb of the prophet Elijah, preaches the urgency of repentance in the remote Jordan Valley before the looming eschaton (Matthew 3.1-17).² These four prototypical charismatic holy men all trusted in the solitary desert as the place of purgation, prophecy, and spiritual warfare. Four centuries after the crucifixion of Christ, Christian holy women and men also sought spiritual perfection in the deserts of Syria and Egypt.

The *vitae* of ascetic women and men reveal the theological messages central to any understanding of Christian desert spirituality.³ Hagiographers recast the desert as a sacred terrain, where emaciated hermits recreate Christ's passion through ascetic practices. In return, God endows both female and male bodies with salvific powers.⁴ Hagiographers constructed spiritual models of anchorites of both sexes to feature the theology of the crucifixion. Christ's sacrifice on the cross initiated both the expulsion of evil from the world and the rehabilitation of sinful humanity. Male desert *vitae* dramatize the militant aspects of this soteriology. The stalwart desert fathers purge the world of demonic influence, acting as militant guardians of humankind. The *vitae* of desert men chronicle the metamorphosis of

male flesh from dust to spirit, from Old Adam to New Adam (1 Corinthians 15.45–47). The lives of enshrined female penitents as recounted by their sacred biographers underscore the restorative powers of the cross. Women alienated from God (Genesis 3.6) can be reconciled to the Creator through an impassioned ascetic regime and self-entombment. Such females serve as mediators of human salvation; they atone for the sorrowful life of the postlapsarian Eve. The lives of desert men therefore reflect the supernatural spirituality of Christ and the prophets, while women's *vitae* humanize the militancy of desert asceticism and preach the necessity for universal repentance.

Apocalypse and Repentance in the Desert

The desert symbolically became the mother of the fourth- and fifth-century ascetic movement: "For more are the children of the desert than the children of the married wife" (Isaiah 54.1). The caves, hilltops, and constructed cells of the Egyptian and Syrian wasteland housed desert matriarchs and patriarchs whose heroic self-abnegation transformed them into legendary models of repentance and spirituality. Inasmuch as Christian hagiographers viewed the desert as an eschatological paradise free from mundane hierarchies, they adapted both holy women and men to biblical portraits of Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist.

Hagiographical depictions of the anchorites' dwellings, *askesis*, and salvific powers, however, belie the different theological strategies of male and female *vitae*. Certain holy men inhabit the natural landscape that was created by God before the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. The omnipotent Syrian and Egyptian anchorites dwell in the wilderness, in places such as ditches, bogs, and groves. Abba Elias survives for seventy years on the side of a remote mountain: "He had his seat under a rock in a cave, so that even the sight of him was very impressive."⁵ Elias is portrayed as a prelapsarian being who "does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands" (Acts 17.24–25). Similarly, the Syrian holy man, Julian, lives in a cave "not made by hands."⁶ Macarius of Alexandria sits naked in the Egyptian marshes.⁷ Abba Macedonius crucifies his flesh in a pit.⁸ James of Nisibis roams the Syrian hilltops in imitation of Elijah. In the spring and summer he lives in forests, while in the winter he retires to a cave. He refuses to make fires, thereby rejecting a fundamental skill of civilized humanity.⁹ The lifestyles of holy men prove they are spiritual beings who have returned to the divine landscape created in Genesis (1.9).

God grants them the power of subduing ferocious beasts because, like Adam (Genesis 1.26), hermits possess dominion over the animal kingdom.¹⁰

Other desert fathers imitate the passion and resurrection of Christ in human-made sepulchers.¹¹ The Syrian Abba Limnaeus constructs a tiny cell out of unmortared stones, sealing the door with mud. He reconciles the diseased and the possessed to God's grace, and he blesses pilgrims through a window. Athanasius's *Life of Antony* represents the saint mortifying his flesh and immuring himself in a tomb. The holy man engages in such fierce demonic combat that he collapses on the floor of his sepulcher. He finally emerges from the shrine with a new, spiritual body that is the physical manifestation of the apostle Paul's pronouncement, "it is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15.44). Antony transforms himself into the New Adam or Christ through his rituals of self-abnegation, and, in return, God grants him the martial power of the cross—the power to bind and loose souls. The *Life of Antony* is thus a metaphorical re-creation of the passion, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Angelic recluses, like Antony, who roam the wilderness are mistaken for heavenly beings, just as the apostles Paul and Barnabas had been wrongly identified as Hermes and Zeus by the inhabitants of Iconium (Acts 14.12). A paralyzed beggar acknowledges Abba Agathon as a celestial being: "Raising his eyes, [the beggar] saw no man; [Agathon] was an angel of the Lord."¹² Abba Antony is such a visible icon of the faith that merely the sight of him insures salvation.¹³ Abba Eustathius's asceticism transforms his body into that of Christ crucified, for he is so emaciated that "the sun shone through his bones."¹⁴ Certain hermits engage in such fierce *askesis* that they no longer appear to be human. Abba Adolius's excruciating mortification and intense vigils led to the suspicion that he was a monster.¹⁵ Abba Ammonius brands his flesh, Abba Julian reduces his body to skin and bones, and Abba John's swollen feet split because he never sits down.¹⁶ Other fathers resemble biblical heroes. With his long beard and graceful body, Abba Arsenius looks like Jacob; his continuous weeping causes his eyelashes to fall out.¹⁷ Desert patriarchs, like their Hebrew counterparts, outlive ordinary mortals because they no longer share human notions of time. Abba Cronides lives to the age 110, Abba Elias to 100, and Antony himself lives to 105.

The ascetic transformation of the male body from dust to spirit equips holy men with the militant powers of the cross and the apocalyptic prowess of the Archangel Michael, who battled a fierce serpent in the desert: "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the

dragon. . . . And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan" (Revelation 12.7–9).¹⁸ The Egyptian monks constitute a band of warrior-angels who safeguard humanity from demonic reptiles. According to one text, an entourage of desert pilgrims beheld the tracks of a large serpent. The hermit who had been guiding the group through the wilderness dispelled their terror by explaining that "we have destroyed many serpents and asps and horned vipers with our bare hands, and have fulfilled in our own lives the Scripture which says, 'I gave unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy'" (Luke 10.19).¹⁹ Desert hagiographers develop a martial vocabulary to describe the celestial training of the anchorites. The hermits are likened to an army expecting its emperor, to a legion of angels, and to serpent-slayers who spit on demons. The barren landscape houses these godly soldiers, who cross pathless mountains by reading the stars. They collect water by sponging dew off rocky peaks, and they test their strength by destroying demons lurking in caves.

Male desert *vitae* provide Christian audiences with superhuman exemplars of Christian spirituality. The lives of the Syrian and Egyptian fathers intimate that the male body is perfectible in this world, for the desert patriarchs outlive ordinary humans and their angelic appearance manifests their sanctity. The male hermits have returned to the prelapsarian world where humans lived in harmony with their Creator. They re-create the landscape conceived by God before the fall, and the most exalted male anchorites communicate their abandonment of human society by embracing the natural life: "Many have not been induced to have a cave or hole or hut or cell, but giving their bodies to the naked air endure contrasts of temperature sometimes frozen by unrelieved frost, sometimes burnt by the fire of the sun's rays."²⁰ Through militant asceticism, they become Christ crucified whose self-sacrifice began the expulsion of evil from the world. These God-men have "appeared like stars in the East and reached the ends of the world with their rays."²¹

In some respects the *vitae* of female anchorites resemble the structure of male lives. Desert women engage in terrifying acts of self-crucifixion, they immure themselves in claustrophobic cells, and they serve as suffering mediators of divine grace. But whereas the lives of the lofty God-men approach celestial status on earth, most female *vitae* remain earthbound. Desert hagiographers use the lives of female anchorites and cenobites to humanize the militant spirituality of the desert and to preach the urgency of universal repentance. Contrite, obedient women are forerunners to ecu-

menical redemption because they atone for Eve's fall from grace.²² And, like the women in the Christian gospels who instantly obey Jesus' command, female hermits personify total submission to the divine will.

Most holy women live in human-made structures, not in the open desert. The fifth-century desert chronicler Palladius immortalized the life of one female penitent, Alexandra, who symbolically remade herself into the Virgin Mary. Palladius recounts, "[Abba Didymus] also told me about a maidservant named Alexandra who left the city and immured herself in a tomb. She received the necessities of life through a window and for ten years never looked at a woman or man in the face."²³ Palladius's brief *vita* of Amma Alexandra parallels Athanasius's *Life of Antony*. Like the fearsome Antony, Alexandra journeys into the desert and transforms a house for the dead into her dwelling, for "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15.54). Alexandra, in Palladius's narrative, recounts her ascetic experience to the famous Roman holy woman, Melania the Elder, who comes seeking her advice through the window of the tomb. Alexandra informs Melania of her own personal motivation to take up the *via crucis*: "A man was distracted in mind because of me, and rather than scandalize a soul made in the image of God, I betook myself alive to a tomb, lest I seem to cause him suffering or reject him."²⁴ When Melania asks the great amma how she endures the tedium of desert *askesis*, Alexandra replies that constant prayer, spinning flax, and meditating on holy scripture are sufficient to defeat the noontide demon of ennui. She merely "eats her crusts" and awaits the death of her flesh. Alexandra dies peacefully in her cell, which is so heavily bulwarked that the woman who routinely brought the amma food must break down the vault to retrieve the holy body.

This terse *vita* presents the female anchorite as an heir to the charismatic piety of the desert fathers. Like the heroic hermits, Amma Alexandra remakes a place of death into the locus of spiritual rebirth. She engages in model ascetic behavior: continuous prayer, manual labor, and vigilant celibacy. And, like the male recluses, she advises spiritual disciples through the window of her cell. Palladius's description of Alexandra's conversion to radical *askesis*, however, relies on a different theological purpose than that of Athanasius's Antony. Both anchorites trust friends and servants to bring them food, and both recluses achieve ascetic fame through their self-entombment. Antony, however, uses his sepulcher as a temporary battleground. According to Athanasius's *vita*, the abba survives savage attacks by demons who appear to him in the guise of torturers, beasts, and reptiles. His conflict with the devil is so intense that his friend who had been sup-

plying the ascetic with bread found the exhausted recluse lying on the floor of the sepulcher as if he were dead. At the end of Antony's tenure in the tomb, he vanquishes the devil: "The Lord did not forget the wrestling of Antony, but came to his aid. For when he looked up he saw the roof being opened, as it seemed, and a certain beam of light descending toward him."²⁵ This saving light (*aktina phōtos*) illuminates the spiritual "wrestler" and decimates Satan's subordinates.²⁶ After a celestial voice promises the godly athlete that he would become famous throughout the world, he leaves the crypt and embarks on a militant career in the open wilderness.²⁷ The tomb offers only a transient spiritual shelter for the famous abba whose tenure there is for the purpose of athletic training. Similarly, the Syrian father Baradatus begins his ascetic career in a cramped cell, dwells in a wooden coffin, and then emerges into the open air.²⁸ The tombs and cells of holy women, on the other hand, function as the fixed places of their piety and are symbolic of saintly women's inviolable chastity.

Alexandra's decision to immure herself in the desert, as Palladius presents it, stems from her desire to save the souls of men. Palladius's *vita* duplicates the gender precepts of sacred discourse by presenting the female body as a source of temptation. By removing her body from the sight of men, Alexandra works for male redemption. Thus Amma Alexandra's self-entombment elevates her as a salvific force within the human community.²⁹ Antony imitates the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to achieve the salvific power of exorcism. Similarly, Alexandra's self-imprisonment is a redemptive act that empowers her to mediate the salvation of men. The obedient Alexandra is like the Virgin Mary, who submits to divine power: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1.38). Amma Alexandra's ascetic lifestyle, as Palladius describes, is stationary and passive. She does not fight the demonic battalions of the wasteland but struggles in her cell against another desert enemy, ennui. She spins flax in her crypt in imitation of the charitable, chaste women of Hebrew and Christian sacred discourse, and there she awaits the death of her flesh. The mortal Alexandra is unlike the God-men of the desert who dwell in a divine landscape and move in sacred time.

Other desert women, such as the Egyptian Piamoun who settles village disputes from the cell she shares with her mother, find the source of their ascetic power within enclosed spaces.³⁰ Syrian hagiography also provides examples of immured women ascetics who pray, spin, and seclude their bodies from the sight of men. The physical appearance of these women associates them not with the biblical patriarchs and prophets but

with the baldness and wretchedness of the repentant “daughters of Zion” (Isaiah 3.24–26). The emaciated Syrian mothers conceal their flesh with enveloping cloaks, and immense iron weights force them to creep about their crypts in imitation of the doubled-over woman in Luke (13.11–13).³¹ Their self-entombment represents militant virginity because fortified tombs make the female body impenetrable; their Madonna-like chastity reverses Eve’s fall from grace. Enclosed spaces also point to the language of the Song of Songs (4.12) which defines God’s bride as “a garden locked, a fountain sealed.” Enshrined, penitential females do not strangle reptiles or expel demonic legions. The fact that women can live as charismatic recluses is a miraculous event itself, according to these metaphorical texts. The hallowed lives of mournful women personify repentance and submission. They convey that female flesh can evolve allegorically from the fallen Eve to the immaculate Virgin.³²

Pelagia: God's Holy Harlot

The late antique biographers of the legendary ammai, Pelagia of Antioch and Mary of Egypt, recount how the two former harlots convert to the life of radical self-abnegation. Mary’s iconoclastic *vita* diverges from the standard life of an enshrined penitent, for the harlot-saint roams the Jordan River Valley where she displays her naked body to a male priest who becomes her votary. Pelagia travels independently in Palestine wearing a bishop’s *chiton*. The lives of both harlot-saints, however, soften such provocative images by merging the biblical motif of defiled woman as instrument of salvation with desert portraits of penitential recluses.

The life of Pelagia of Antioch probably first circulated orally among fifth-century ascetics in Syria and Palestine and later became a popular liturgical tale of conversion. The earliest written text of the life may date from the seventh century. There exist numerous translations of a Greek original, including Syriac, Latin, Arabic, Armenian, and Slavic versions.³³ Latin translations of the *vita* were known in the early medieval West, and the legend remained popular throughout the Middle Ages.³⁴ An emended version appears in Jacobus de Voragine’s thirteenth-century hagiographical collection, *The Golden Legend*. In Jacobus de Voragine’s rendering, Pelagia describes herself as “a sea of iniquity cresting with waves of sin . . . an abyss of perdition.”³⁵

Pelagia’s mythological biography is based on a series of other texts, including the apocryphal lives of Mary Magdalene, martyr narratives that

feature transvestism, and desert *vitae* that profile the miraculous conversion of actresses and whores. Male desert anchorites themselves use the image of a harlot to characterize monastic discipleship.³⁶ Pelagia's hagiographer, who claims to have been an eyewitness to the events he describes, introduces himself in the text as a deacon named James, who accompanied a Bishop Nonnus to a fifth-century episcopal synod held at the church of Julian the Martyr in Antioch.³⁷ James describes Nonnus not only as a paragon of episcopal virtue but also as a monk from the most famous *coenobium* in Egypt, the Pachomian foundation at Tabennisi.³⁸ Nonnus, the hagiographer emphasizes, had been forced into the onerous office of bishop because of his desert training and pristine spirituality.

According to the *vita*, Nonnus and James arrive at Antioch and join the congregation of bishops who had assembled at the entrance of the basilica of Saint Julian. The other metropolitans beg the eloquent and erudite Nonnus to deliver the first sermon. While Nonnus is speaking, a parade of opulently dressed actors, mimes, and slaves passes by the porch of the church. The foremost actress of Antioch, Pelagia, sits astride an ass, her great beauty singling her out among the debauched retinue. Gold, pearls, and gems cover her body, and her feet and head are bare; her perfumes and ointments drift over the seated bishops as she sinuously passes.³⁹ Scandalized, the holy men throw their veils over their heads and hide their faces within the folds of their scapulas.⁴⁰

Nonnus, however, not only refuses to bury his head in his sacred garb, he gazes intently at the exquisite woman. In an almost comical fashion, he repeatedly questions the other bishops: "Were you not delighted by her great beauty?"⁴¹ When the other bishops do not reply, Nonnus mocks his compatriots by hiding his head in a copy of the holy scripture.⁴² Because the other bishops continue to resist the physical allure of the actress, Nonnus brilliantly incorporates her bejeweled image into his sermon, castigating the episcopacy by comparing the meticulous care with which Pelagia decorates her body to the work of embellishing the soul for the bridegroom, Christ: "Why do we not adorn ourselves and wash the dirt from our unhappy souls, why do we let ourselves lie so neglected?"⁴³ Afterward, Nonnus and James retire to their rooms, and the bishop continues his discourse on the soul and the bridegroom from the Song of Songs.⁴⁴ He laments the state of his own soul in a prayer to God: "Alas, I am a sinner and unworthy, for I stand before your altar and I do not offer you a soul adorned with the beauty you want to see in me."⁴⁵

On the Sabbath, Nonnus preaches from the episcopal throne, or *ca-*

thedra, of the bishop of Antioch. His stunning sermon causes the congregation to flood the cathedral with their tears. Pelagia, who had never before entered a church, crosses the sacred threshold and listens to Nonnus's discourse. After Nonnus grants her an audience, Pelagia prostrates her body before the entire synod and pleads with Nonnus to baptize her. Nonnus assents and provides the harlot with a baptismal sponsor, the deacon Romana. He then exorcises and baptizes the repentant actress and feeds her holy communion.⁴⁶

After her baptism, Pelagia dons the white tunic of a spiritual catechumen and moves into the house provided for the newly baptized. She struggles with the demons of fornication and avarice and soon resolves to leave the city for the wilderness. She bequeaths her jewels, ornate clothing, gold, and silver to Nonnus, who distributes them to widows, orphans, and other poor. She also frees her slaves and provides each with a gold collar.⁴⁷ On the eighth day after her baptism, she removes her *tunica alba* according to church custom, but violates the ritual purity commandments of Deuteronomy (22.5) by donning Nonnus's tunic or *chiton*. She then flees Antioch and travels to Jerusalem where she builds a cell on the Mount of Olives.⁴⁸

Years later, Bishop Nonnus sends Deacon James to Jerusalem to locate a famous holy anchorite named Pelagius. James makes the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, lodges with the monks on the Mount of Olives, and eventually discovers Pelagius's cell.⁴⁹ He knocks on the window and an emaciated figure with sunken eyes appears at the opening of the oratory.⁵⁰ James informs the shriveled hermit that he had been sent by Bishop Nonnus. The anchorite succinctly replies: "Tell him to pray for me." James departs for the city inspired by the angelic face of the recluse. Once back in Jerusalem, he learns of the holy reputation of the immured Pelagius. In response, James returns to the cell but finds the saint dead inside the crypt. He collects a number of monks who break down the cell and carry the "sacred little body" outside.⁵¹ As they prepare the body for burial, the ascetics discover that Pelagius is really Pelagia. This "miracle" attracts crowds of pilgrims who marvel at Pelagia's holy life: "Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for you have hidden away on earth such great treasures, women as well as men."⁵² Her funeral procession is an elaborate affair: "Monks came in from all the monasteries and also nuns, from Jericho and from the Jordan where the Lord was baptised, bearing candles and lamps and singing hymns; and the holy fathers bore her body to its burial."⁵³ Pelagia's successful metamorphosis into Christ crucified had deceived even the deacon,

who questioned himself: "How could I have known her again, with a face so emaciated by fasting?"⁵⁴

Scholars have focused on the *Life of Pelagia the Harlot* to explore the symbolic function of ascetic transvestism in late antique hagiographical literature.⁵⁵ One historian has claimed that spiritual cross-dressing was a revolutionary act because it enabled women to "escape their social, and indeed their biological destiny."⁵⁶ Pelagia's *vita*, however, presents a feminized portrait of ascetic spirituality rather than a model for women to escape their biological fate. Her transvestism serves as a textual device that enables the hagiographer to explain how the former harlot journeyed alone to the Holy Land. The *topos* originates in Greco-Roman adventure tales and Christian martyr texts that feature female heroines who elude their male captors or guardians by traveling independently in masculine guise. (For example, in the second-century *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the ascetic heroine, Thecla, puts on a man's *chiton* and travels to Myra.)⁵⁷ Pelagia's adoption of male garb and her subsequent metamorphosis into a spiritual eunuch is not the crucial theological issue in this text. The symbolic heart of the *vita* lies in its re-creation of biblical texts which describe the metaphorical relationship between contrite women and spiritual men. Biblical conversion rhetoric recasts Nonnus and Pelagia as Solomon and the queen of Sheba, the bride and groom from the Song of Songs, Christ and a repentant female sinner, and the New Adam and New Eve. The *vita* reinforces the Christian theology of the cosmetic, the necessity of universal repentance, and the power of male altar servants to reconcile female sinners to God.

In the Hebrew Bible, a wealthy woman visits King Solomon to test his wisdom: "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions, having a very great retinue and camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones" (2 Chronicles 9.1). Solomon so astounds the queen with his brilliance that there was "no more spirit in her" (2 Chronicles 9.4). After the queen submits to Solomon's authority, she extols his God-given power: "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on his throne as king" (2 Chronicles 9.8). She then bequeaths to Solomon countless treasures, including talents of gold, gems, and spices (2 Chronicles 9.9), and returns to Sheba. The *Life of Pelagia the Harlot*—with its rich retinue, daring woman, precious goods, and eloquence evoking penitence—clearly reconstructs this biblical passage. In the Hebrew Bible, a wise and holy man subdues a spirited and wealthy woman; in the hagiographical retelling

of this story, an exemplary ascetic reconciles a recalcitrant female sinner to God's grace.

This sacred fiction is also a Christian reworking of the Hebrew Song of Songs which describes the intense, sexual desire of a bride and bridegroom: "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth" (Song of Songs 1.2). On the surface, Nonnus and Pelagia share an intense, erotic passion, but the didactic intention of the author is clearly theological, not sexual. Monastic audiences understood the erotic poetry of Solomon's love songs as a metaphor of Christ's relationship with the individual soul or Christ and the church.⁵⁸ In Pelagia's *vita*, the subtle eroticism of the text signifies the intimate experience of divine love in the individual soul. Pelagia's "jewels and ornaments" and her "fragrance of oils" seduce Nonnus (Song of Songs 1.10–11, 4.9–10): "His speech [which] is most sweet" (Song of Songs 5.16) captivates the actress. Pelagia's jeweled body represents the soul adorned before God; Nonnus's "ravished heart" (Song of Songs 4.9) personifies the human desire for God. The hagiographer thus transforms the ecstatic dialogue between confessor and penitent into an allegory of the soul ravished before God.

Pelagia is also the biblical harlot who represents human apostasy from God, and Nonnus's spiritual taming of this willful woman emulates Christ's conversion of polluted women. In the gospel of Luke (7.37–38), a notorious female sinner enters the house where Jesus and the apostles are dining, and she anoints Jesus' feet and washes them with her tears and wipes them with her hair. The men at the table castigate Jesus for allowing an unclean woman to touch him. "The Pharisee who had invited him saw it, and he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner'" (Luke 7.39). Jesus rebukes the Pharisee for his inhospitality and embraces the repentant female as a vessel of pure faith. Pelagia's *vita* reproduces this scene from Luke. When Pelagia boldly passes by the bishops seated on the church porch, the hagiographer claims that all of the holy men except Nonnus hid their faces in their scapulas. Like the Pharisee who recognizes the female anointer as a notorious sinner, the synod of bishops shuns the actress because of her reputation for debauchery. Nonnus, who covers his head with his Bible, preaches to the others that God should be their refuge, not material embodiments of their rank such as the *scapula*. The hagiographer uses an unclean woman to castigate prideful male altar servants, including Nonnus, who claims that "today the ornaments of a harlot have shone more brightly than the ornaments of my soul."⁵⁹

The former harlot's intense compunction shames the male hierarchy, just as the passionate faith of evangelical women humbled the male apostles, whom Christ rebukes as "foolish men, and slow of heart to believe" (Luke 24.25). Pelagia writes to Nonnus that she is like the sexually depraved Samaritan woman whom Christ converts at a well (John 4.7–39): "Will you look upon me, as He did?"⁶⁰ When the harlot enters the church to be baptized, she pleads with the bishop to remember Christ's compassion toward sinners: "If you are a true disciple of Christ, do not reject me, for through you I may deserve to see His face."⁶¹ She imitates the repentant action of the woman who anoints Jesus by washing Nonnus's feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair in full view of the other bishops.⁶² Pelagia cautions the bishop that, if he does not baptize her, he will be like an apostate and idolater. In the *Life of Pelagia the Harlot*, the hierarchical servant represents the pathway to grace, while the sinful woman manifests the universal nature of God's love. The hagiographer employs the rhetoric of inversion to remind Christian audiences that faith depends on submission and repentance—that is, on qualities closely associated with the female.

The *vita* also presents Pelagia's metamorphosis from the fallen Eve to the immaculate Mary. The cell on the Mount of Olives transforms Pelagia's voluptuous body into a vessel of God's grace. The hagiographer signifies her piety not by recounting tales of heroic warfare against demons but by describing her withered flesh and skull-like face. Pelagia's conversion to the life of penance is the *vita*'s miracle. Pelagia's mythographer features her cell, an enclosed space perfecting the process of conversion.⁶³ Pelagia, who personifies the bride from the Song of Songs (4.12), has now become "a garden locked, a fountain sealed." The architecture of seclusion transforms a body that had been open to sin into an impenetrable fortress, and Pelagia transmutes into the New Eve and the immaculate Virgin. Although this text features a woman who symbolically becomes a man, the *vita* presents a very feminized portrait of desert asceticism. Pelagia, like the other female recluses of the desert, mortifies her flesh to atone for the fall of Eve.

The hagiographer employs the theology of the cosmetic to further the Eve-Mary duality. Pelagia first appears in the text as the embodiment of feminine self-indulgence: "She was dressed in the height of fantasy, wearing nothing but gold, pearls, and precious stones, even her bare feet were covered with gold and pearls."⁶⁴ The woman tells Nonnus, "I was called Pelagia by my parents but the people of Antioch have called me Margaret (a pearl) because of the amount of jewelry with which my sins have

adorned me; for I am decked out as a slave for the devil.”⁶⁵ Tertullian, the great theologian of the Christian cosmetic, had claimed that Eve’s expulsion from paradise resulted from her desire for ornate dress and shiny baubles.⁶⁶ The hagiographer denotes Pelagia’s fallen state by the pearls and gold that cover her naked body. She is the besotted whore from Revelation (17.4): “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls.” The hagiographer represents Pelagia’s conversion by reporting that she relinquishes her jewels, perfumes, and ointments—the *signa* of her enslavement to sin—to the bishop Nonnus, who exorcises the jewels and donates them to orphans, widows, and beggars.⁶⁷ Pelagia ends her life as a withered recluse who, like a daughter of Zion, replaces perfume with rottenness, a girdle with rope, a rich robe with sackcloth, and beauty with shame. “Ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground” (Isaiah 3.24–26).

Throughout the *vita*, the figure of Nonnus serves as the conduit of grace and the Christ-like savior of this “New Eve.” The sacred biographer uses the anomalous image of the harlot-saint to castigate the pride of the late antique episcopacy and to reaffirm the power of consecrated altar servants. The bishop is a Christ-like holy man whose eloquent speech personifies the power of the Holy Spirit. He preaches from the *cathedra*, the symbol of episcopal authority, and his conversion of the harlot requires the hierarchical prerogatives of baptismal exorcism and holy communion. Nonnus obeys church law by appointing baptismal sponsors to ensure that the prostitute will not lapse into her old life of sin. His sublime oratory converts her, and he teaches her how to make the *signum crucis* to exorcize the demons of fornication. Moreover, she initiates her life of radical self-abnegation by donning his tunic. The *vita* both rebukes male altar servants and empowers them by embracing the biblical rhetoric of inversion.

The *Life of Pelagia the Harlot* is built on a series of paradoxical images. Nonnus first appears in the narrative as a Christ-like holy man, and Pelagia disports herself as the incarnation of feminine apostasy and blasphemy. The hagiographer describes the saintly bishop as Christ’s apostle, while Pelagia characterizes herself as Satan’s votary. Nonnus officiates at the sacred altar, but the harlot has never even crossed the threshold of a Christian church. Her advent in the *vita* is a satirical re-creation of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem: “The next day a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. . . . And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it” (John 12.12–14). Pelagia, in *imitatio Christi*, proudly passes by the episcopal synod riding an ass. The first half of Pelagia’s life

mocks the more conventional lives of female saints who engage in extensive charity, join the discipleship of important church leaders and ascetics, and travel independently around the Mediterranean with their own retinues.⁶⁸ Pelagia's charity assumes a sexual form, and her admirers are lecherous men, not virginal ascetics. Her spirited independence stems from the wealth she earns from lascivious acts. Her entourage includes actors and whores, and, when she frees her slaves, she gives them golden collars, thus parodying the iron shackles worn by ordinary bond servants. This paradoxical *vita* does not offer a revolutionary portrait of female piety, but reaffirms well-established biblical depictions of defiled women who submit to divine power through the mediation of spiritual men. Pelagia's *vita* thus highlights the restorative powers of the crucifixion by portraying the conversion of the harlot to the life of penance.

Mary of Egypt: Vessel of Sin and Repentance

Unlike the *Life of Pelagia the Harlot*, the sacred biography of Mary of Egypt departs from stereotypical portrayals of female piety. Mary's hagiographer radically rewrites the biblical discourse on prophecy and charisma by adding a spiritually potent woman to the chain of male prophets and miracle workers. The *vita*, which is attributed to the patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius (c. 600), is based on a series of earlier texts, including Jerome's fourth-century *Life of Paul the First Hermit*.⁶⁹ The life also follows the pattern established in the fifth-century desert corpus of depraved women who castigate male pride.⁷⁰ Although Mary's life originates from fourth- and fifth-century desert texts, the earliest written version may date from the seventh century, and, like the *Life of Pelagia the Harlot*, the Greek text has been translated into numerous languages. Knowledge of the *vita* in the West may have been as early as the seventh century.⁷¹ The ninth-century court of the Carolingian king, Charles the Bald, possessed a small volume of the Latin *vita* which may have been used for lay devotional purposes.⁷² Mary appears in the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* as a "public woman" who "never refused her body to anyone."⁷³ This sacred fiction continued to be popular throughout the Middle Ages as an epic story of repentance and conversion.

The *vita* of Mary of Egypt is a complicated text that not only places Mary in the roles of Christ, Elijah, and Saul but also contains stereotypical reactions to female sanctity. The hagiographer refashions the former whore into a female Saul, for, like Saul, Mary receives loaves of bread before beginning her spiritual journey (1 Samuel 10.3–4). Her independent

life in the desert resembles the spiritual solitude of Elijah and Christ. Moreover, her *vita* follows the eastern model of repentance which emphasizes the extra-institutional power of living anchorites.⁷⁴ Mary's extraordinary power stems not from a church office or from symbolic consecration, but comes from her simple ascetic regime, her devotion to the Virgin Mary, and her direct communion with God.

Mary's hagiographer characterizes her independence, piety, and extreme asceticism by providing her with emaciated flesh, withered breasts, short hair, and sun-blackened skin. The holy woman, unlike most of her female counterparts, lives in the Jordanian wilderness. She miraculously crosses the Jordan River in imitation of Elisha and Jesus: "As soon as she had made the sign of the cross, she stepped on to the water and walking over the flowing waves she came as if walking on solid land."⁷⁵ Mary describes the harsh life of the desert to her confessor: "I was burned by the heat of the summer and frozen stiff in the winter by so much cold."⁷⁶ She has no access to learning, but like the greatest male heroes of the Egyptian desert, relies on spiritual wisdom. She lives off bread and herbs, and her physiognomy parallels that of the Son of Man in Revelation (1.14), for she is "naked, her body black as if scorched by the fierce heat of the sun, [her] hair . . . was white as wool and short, coming down only to the neck."⁷⁷ The enervating regime of desert life is inscribed on the body of Mary of Egypt, which resembles that of the eschatological Messiah.

It is this extraordinary physical appearance that the priest Zosimas encounters on a trip into the desert. Zosimas had been raised in a monastery and his spirituality reflects the disciplined routine of the communal life. When he is in his fifties, however, he leaves his own monastery and travels to another *coenobium* located in the Jordan River Valley. The hagiographer explains that God had led Zosimas to the Jordanian community because it follows a strict rule. He also describes the hermitage as a training place for charismatic prophets and master ascetics inasmuch as the monks are required to don the tattered clothing of Elijah and graze in the desert like the great hermits of Syria. The brotherhood's spiritual goal is "to be in the body as a corpse, to die completely to the world and everything in the world."⁷⁸ In order to enact this sacrificial death, the monastery requires all its monks to leave the community during Lent and go into the desert in imitation of Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Christ. While in the desert, the holy men are to pray, keep night vigils, and live off the wasteland. Zosimas participates in this eremitic ritual and penetrates the depths of the Jordanian desert carrying with him only a little food and ragged clothing.

Zosimas roams the wilderness for twenty days, prays facing East, and

sleeps on the hard ground. While he is meditating, he sees a naked, sun-blackened female walking in the desert. His first reaction to this peculiar human body is to make the sign of the cross to protect himself from demonic fantasy. In fact, the hagiographer intends his audience to view this initial contact between male confessor and female penitent as an allusion to Jesus' first encounter with the devil in the desert (Matthew 4.1–3). Zosimas decides that this unusual individual is indeed human, and he violates his vow not to seek human contact by pursuing the unclothed woman along the banks of the Jordan. After an exhaustive chase, the charismatic figure turns toward Zosimas and addresses him by his name; she requests that he clothe her in his threadbare monastic cloak. The two ascetics then kneel together and argue over who should give the blessing. Mary reminds Zosimas that, because he is a priest and has the power to stand by the sacrificial table and to distribute the body and blood of Christ, he should bless her. Zosimas responds by emphasizing that God had led him to a “mother in the spirit” in order that he may receive a spiritual charism. The priest also informs the amma that “grace is recognised not by office but by gifts of the Spirit.”⁷⁹ Mary acquiesces and begins praying for the holy man.

Zosimas trembles at her words, her ability to levitate while praying, and her Christ-like power of clairvoyance. Although he still believes that she might be a demonic fantasy, the wasted figure assures him that she is flesh and not spirit.⁸⁰ Zosimas pleads with the shriveled woman to explain how she came to live her life for Christ “for whose sake you clothed yourself in this nakedness, for whose sake you have wasted your flesh.”⁸¹ Mary agrees to recount her history because, as she explains, “you have seen my body . . . why not my bare life?” Before narrating the miraculous conversion of her sinful existence, the saint warns Zosimas that her life has been the exact opposite of priests, God's chosen vessels, for she had been the “chosen vessel of the devil.” The hagiographer establishes a context for Mary as a fallen Eve in the amma's caution to the holy man that the details of her life will make him “run from her as from a snake.”⁸²

Before living for over forty years as an ascetic in the Jordan Valley, Mary experienced a life that was wholly contrary to the conventional tales of the childhood days of female saints. She abandoned her parents at the age of twelve—when many holy women vow marriage to Christ—and journeyed to Alexandria. There she earned a living by begging and by spinning flax, and offered her body for pleasure, not payment. By classical standards, Mary was the worst kind of harlot because she engaged in intercourse not from financial need but to satisfy lust. She always carried a

spindle, as if to mock the distaffs of the chaste, charitable women of sacred and classical discourse. The ex-prostitute informs the undefiled priest that all unnatural acts were welcome to her.

Eventually Mary met a group of sailors at Alexandria's harbor who were headed for the Holy Land to attend the festival of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The harlot pushed her way through the crowd of pilgrims and, in an inversion of pious preaching, enticed the Egyptian and Libyan seafarers with lewd language. Mary claimed that at the time her strong desire to go with them was motivated not by religious ceremony but by the beautiful bodies of the seamen to whom she offered her own as payment for the voyage. She, like Jezebel, led men to sin, for once she arrived in Jerusalem, she seduced male pilgrims at the religious festivals. Mary's journey to Jerusalem is a perverted pilgrimage, and her activities in the city invert the Christian apostolic mission; as she tells Zosimas, "I was hunting for the souls of young men."⁸³ During the festival of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Mary attempted to enter a church, but her polluted body was miraculously suspended outside the sacred space, held fast by the discriminating power of a relic of the true cross. Resting in the basilica's forecourt, she saw an icon of the *Theotokos* which impelled her to confess her sins to the Virgin, weep, and beat her breast.⁸⁴ She called upon the Mother of God as the mediator of salvation, imploring the Virgin to grant her access to the *sanctus sanctorum*.

Finally, the miraculous power of Christ's Mother guided Mary's sinful body over the threshold of the church, where the harlot "threw [herself] on the floor and kissed the sacred dust."⁸⁵ She then returned to the icon and vowed to remake her body into a vessel of repentance. The Virgin's celestial voice instructed her to go out into the wilderness and cross over the Jordan River. Mary left the forecourt of the church and walked through the streets of Jerusalem. Her supernatural experience had so transformed her physical appearance that, as she wandered the city, a Christian gave her three coins and called her amma. The transfigured woman used the coins to buy three loaves of bread and then ran out the city gate.

When Mary reached the Jordan River, she washed her hands and face in its salvific waters, an action designed to evoke symbolic baptism and spiritual rebirth. The amma received communion at the church of Saint John the Baptist and then, under the Virgin's direction, she crossed the Jordan. She had been living in the desert for forty-seven years when Zosimas found her walking along the river banks. She tells the virginal monk that during those five decades in the wilderness she had been tempted

by memories of her former life of sin, but that a miraculous light surrounded her and provided her with spiritual peace: "This light saved me from the lusts of mind."⁸⁶ But unlike Antony's "saving light" which rescued the great hermit from vicious, demonic attacks, Mary's saving light delivered her from her inherent depravity. During her generation of desert life, Mary received neither instruction nor communion from a priest until she encountered Zosimas. Zosimas, on hearing this "life-giving narrative," pleads with the holy woman to tell him more.

At this point in the narrative, the hagiographer employs the rhetoric of inversion from the gospels in order to make a spiritual point about miraculous power. A favorite motif of the evangelists uses spiritual doubters to prove the wonder-working abilities of Christ. In the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, it is not the ex-harlot who functions as the "doubting Thomas," but a priest, Zosimas. In Matthew (6.31–34) unfaithful men ask Jesus: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?"⁸⁷ Zosimas, in like fashion, asks the holy woman: "What have you been able to find to eat? Have you passed this length of time without suffering? Did you not have any food or vestments?" Mary, like Christ, convinces the doubting Zosimas that God has mandated her ascetic and charismatic life. In her *vita*, Mary becomes confessor, absolver, and prophet—all male-gendered personifications.⁸⁸

At the end of the narrative, the hagiographer provides a second significant gender reversal. Zosimas journeys again to the desert to administer communion to Mary, only to find her dead. Zosimas responds to this discovery by expressing for Mary the same piety Mary Magdalene demonstrates for Christ (Matthew 26.6–13; Mark 14.3–9; Luke 7.36–50; John 12.1–8): "He saw the holy one lying dead, her hands folded and her face turned to the East. Running up to her, he watered the feet of the blessed one with tears; otherwise he did not dare to touch her. He wept for some time."⁸⁹ The hagiographer emphasizes the intense feelings of Zosimas by framing him in the evangelical role of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary at the cross. Zosimas anoints Mary with his tears, weeps for her, covers her with his monastic cloak, and buries her with maternal care; he dares not touch her, just as the Magdalene was instructed not to touch the risen Christ (John 20.17). The hagiographer represents Zosimas emotionally identifying with the saint to the extent that he is seen to assume the persona of both Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt. This cross-gendering characterizes the physical intensity of Mary of Egypt's faith as masculine, whereas Zosimas's emotional intensity is a feminine expression of piety.

The gender reversals in the *vita* of Mary of Egypt are extreme examples of a hagiographer adhering to the Christ model in celebrating a saint's life that could understandably be viewed as revolutionary. Mary, unlike Pelagia, converts to the life of repentance without the aid of the priesthood, and she lives most of her spiritual life outside the jurisdiction of the church hierarchy. She baptizes herself in the Jordan; her desert *askesis* remakes her body into the eschatological image of the Son of Man. She assumes the guise of a hierarchical servant and reduces a priest to the status of an ascetic disciple. At the same time, however, the hagiographer also tempers the potentially subversive message of Mary's independence from the ecclesiastical hierarchy by introducing a male figure, the ascetic and priest Zosimas. In fact, Mary's hagiographer makes her encounter with Zosimas, the representative of the male hierarchy, the central feature of the *vita*.

The final sections of the life underscore the salvific importance of the eucharist. Mary begs the priest to bring her Christ's body and blood in a "holy vessel."⁹⁰ She takes communion at the church of Saint John the Baptist before entering the depths of the desert, and Zosimas gives communion to her toward the end of her life. These concluding passages also resemble the Hebrew purification rite for female adulterers. In Numbers (5), Yahweh describes for Moses the process for reconciling an unfaithful wife to the community. According to the ceremony, an altar servant shall "take holy water in an earthen vessel. . . . And the priest shall set the woman before the Lord, and unbind the hair of the woman's head, and place in her hands the cereal offering of remembrance" (Numbers 5.16–18). Mary's life thus reaffirms the authority of sacred males; even though the woman walks on water, travels at supernatural speed, and prophesies, at the end of her life she depends on a male priest to cleanse her sins, administer the eucharist to her, and bury her in orthodox fashion. The lesson that the female saint is ultimately subordinate to holy men is reflected in later medieval artistic depictions of Mary that feature the great woman hermit kneeling before the priest Zosimas to receive communion from him, such as Francesco Traini's (or P. Lorenzetti's), "St. Mary of Egypt Receiving the Sacrament" (Figure 2).⁹¹

Although the legend of Mary is a partial re-creation of Jerome's famous life of *Paul the First Hermit* (c. 380), Mary's hagiographer reorders Jerome's *vita* to conform more closely to traditional gender expectations. In Jerome's earlier version, a male ascetic, Paul, is the Mary of Egypt character, while the Zosimas figure is the famous Antony who travels into the



Figure 2. Francesco Traini (P. Lorenzetti?), "St. Mary of Egypt receiving the Sacrament," detail of the Thebaid. Camposanto, Pisa, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

Egyptian desert to find and bury Paul, a superhuman ascetic. The differences between the male and female versions of the same story are noteworthy. In Jerome's narrative, the Zosimas figure (Antony) immediately recognizes the holiness of Paul (the Mary character). In the Mary of Egypt redaction, however, Zosimas first believes that the ex-prostitute's naked, blackened body is a demonic fantasy because desert demons often assumed the guise of women to tempt virginal ascetics. Jerome's *vita* places the two male hermits on an equal footing; they pray together, share bread, and Antony receives instruction from the elder ascetic without reservation. (Figure 3). In contrast, Zosimas questions Mary's validity as a holy person and as a teacher. Paul is very erudite whereas Mary is illiterate and her faith child-like. Paul wears a cloak made from palm leaves; Mary is ashamed of her naked body. Paul is an untouched virgin, but Mary describes her sordid sexual past in shocking detail to the naive Zosimas.⁹² The subtle, erotic images that accent the *vita* of Mary of Egypt reveal the conservative gender reworkings of the female text. The didactic message of Jerome's *Life of Paul the First Hermit* is simple: the virginal, erudite, superhuman recluse Paul was the first inhabitant of the Egyptian desert and the mentor of the more famous Antony. Mary's *vita*, however, transforms the rather uncomplicated message of Jerome's life into a more complex narrative that relies on the harlot-figure as the embodiment of repentance.

The image of the harlot in the *Life of Mary of Egypt* exemplifies hagiographers' dilution of radical gender imagery by introducing more traditional gender precepts found in Hebrew and Christian discourse. The ancient Near Eastern *topos* of the harlot connects the depravity of prostitutes with the pervasive sinful nature of humanity.⁹³ The redemption of even one harlot signifies the potential for universal salvation. The life of the virginal Paul, whose asceticism and godliness are superhuman, could not communicate this message. His is an unattainable model, however, whereas Mary's is accessible to the sinner.⁹⁴ The body of a former prostitute, reformed through extreme mortification, mirrors the hope of an eschatological reward for contrite sinners. Like the *Life of Pelagia*, Mary's *vita* follows the theological pattern of the reversal of Eve's fall through the militant chastity of the Virgin Mary. In fact, the life promotes the cult and theology of the *Theotokos*, for Mary's conversion to the life of repentance springs from her supernatural discovery of her spiritual antithesis, the Blessed Virgin. Mary herself tells Zosimas that the Mother of God had guided her throughout her independent *askesis* in the desert. The hagiographer also emphasizes that the Virgin Mary is the mediator of grace and



Figure 3. Francesco Traini (P. Lorenzetti?), "Saints Paul and Anthony," detail of the Thebaid. Camposanto, Pisa, Italy. Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

that through her immaculate example even the most base sinners can be saved.

Mary's life also follows the biblical prototype of women whose faith is superior to that of the male apostles (Mark 5.24–34, 7.24–30; Matthew 9.19–26, 15.21–28; Luke 8.40–48; John 11.3, 21–32). The *vita* recreates the conversion of the sexually depraved Samaritan woman, who confronts Jesus at a watering well. The simple faith of the Samaritan woman humbles the male apostles who constantly question Jesus' symbolic actions. Mary's hagiographer, like the evangelists, embraces the rhetoric of inversion to castigate the pride of a monk who personifies misguided faith in a monastic rule. Mary functions as the Samaritan woman in her own life because, although she had been an insatiable harlot, contrition and submission yet led her to the purest faith in God. Her *vita* speaks directly to men who, like Zosimas, place too much value on the rational intellect and ritual observance. Mary's contemplative spirituality is gendered female precisely because of its emphasis on obedience and repentance. Indeed, the *Life of Mary of Egypt* is not about the ex-prostitute; it is about both Zosimas and the universal nature of God's love for humanity. The hagiographer uses Mary's simple faith and sordid past to rebuke the works-righteous monk and to affirm the possibility of universal salvation through the conversion of the harlot figure. Like the Virgin Mary who holds the redemption of the world in her womb, the life of the Egyptian Mary suggests that repentant women carry the hope of universal salvation within them.

The most iconoclastic features of the *Life of Mary of Egypt* are her physical description, her independent conversion, and her symbolic self-baptism in the Jordan. In his depiction of Mary's sun-blackened body and white-wool hair, the hagiographer fuses the image of the bride from the Song of Songs (1.5–6), "I am swarthy but beautiful. . . . Do not gaze upon me because I am dark, because the sun has blackened me,"⁹⁵ with the apocalyptic Son of Man from Revelation (1.14), "his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow."⁹⁶ The wizened desert hermit is both the eschatological Messiah and Christ's bride;⁹⁷ she is a vessel of sin and a vessel of redemption; she is the devil's votary and a virginal male's spiritual guide. The Egyptian begins her life as a whore and ends it as a desert hero. Few women's *vitae* demonstrate better the paradoxical nature of sacred gender.

Mary's legendary life, like Pelagia's, belittles the more conventional *vitae* of women saints. The defiled woman has sex for pleasure, she cor-

rupts Christian pilgrims, and she inverts the apostolic mission by “hunting for the souls of young men.” The unrepentant harlot is like the female prophets denounced by the prophet Ezekiel for leading the weak into apostasy: “Will you hunt down souls belonging to my people?” (Ezekiel 13.18). Mary’s *vita*, like Pelagia’s, mocks the charity, chastity, and pilgrimages of most holy women. The harlot-saint’s autonomy results not from celibacy but from carnal corruption. Her philanthropy and charity take the form of the free bestowal of her body on Christian pilgrims; she undertakes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land by offering herself as payment for the voyage. Mary’s conversion to the life of extreme penance, however, transforms her unruly body into a disciplined receptacle of God’s grace. Only the conversion of sexually depraved women, such as Mary of Egypt and Pelagia of Antioch, could teach Christian audiences that redemption is possible even for the most loathsome sinners. The *vitae* of eastern holy men suggest the opposite; only superhuman hermits can hope to bridge the gap between the temporal and the divine. The sacred fictions of reclusive females, however, soften the militancy of male texts by allegorizing the metamorphosis from Eve to the Blessed Virgin, from human perdition to ecumenical redemption.

“Through the Eye of a Needle”

Wealth and Poverty in the Lives of Helena, Paula, and Melania the Younger

IN THE HEBREW AND CHRISTIAN BIBLES, wealthy widows house, nourish, and finance the prophetic and apostolic missions of God’s most holy men. In Hebrew scripture, a wealthy woman from Shunem provides a sanctuary for Elisha: “So whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food. And she said to her husband, ‘Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, who is continually passing our way. Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there’” (2 Kings 4.8–10). God commands a widow of Zarephath to feed Elijah, and she brings the holy man water in a vessel and a morsel of bread (1 Kings 17.8–13). In response to the piety of both these ministering women, Elisha and Elijah resurrect their sons (2 Kings 4.34; 1 Kings 17.22). In the gospels and Acts, prosperous women support Jesus’ ministry and the apostolic missionary movement by supplying their own households as neophyte *ecclesiae* and by offering food and drink to God’s votaries. Jesus himself commends a poor widow who donated two copper coins to God: “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living” (Mark 12.41–44; Luke 21.1–4).

Late antique hagiographers blend the sacred lives of Roman patrician women with biblical depictions of female patrons of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. The fourth- and fifth-century corpus of texts that comprise the Helena legend, Paula’s *epitaphium*, and Melania the Younger’s *vita*, contain dramatic accounts of philanthropy, pious projects, and patronage of the cult of martyrs and saints. These lives advertise the mobility, independence, and empowerment of imperial women who convert to the

life of radical self-abnegation. Helena, Paula, and Melania possessed vast properties and incomes. The Augusta Helena even earned the right to distribute the imperial fisc, and her image was reproduced on gold coins.¹ In their sacred biographies, each of these three wealthy women literally becomes the “poor widow” praised by Jesus for having impoverished herself to support God’s missionaries. The hagiographers detail the patricians’ heroic almsgiving, self-imposed poverty, and their exchange of fine silks for coarse goat hair. All three lives embody Jesus’ commandment to “sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourself with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys” (Luke 12.33). In addition to engaging in sensational acts of charity, Melania the Younger preaches and proselytizes; her life in particular usurps many of the sacred *topoi* of the male priesthood.²

The same hagiographers, however, temper these provocative images of women’s philanthropic, ascetic, and pastoral power by introducing the biblical motif of the chaste, abstemious, charitable woman who combats female depravity and apostasy by remaking her body into a vessel of repentance. Helena, Paula, and Melania all exorcize the demons of feminine self-indulgence through their philanthropy, ministry to the poor, and ascetic attire. They thereby reverse the patristic theology of the cosmetic. Their male hagiographers use these more traditional *topoi* of female piety to emphasize that, although Helena, Paula, and Melania were saintly women, their holiness remains distinct from and subordinate to that of men. Together these three *vitae* serve as spiritual medicine (*remedia*) for other aristocratic women who cling to the feminine vices of lust and vanity.

The three *vitae* are also part of a larger discourse on the post-Constantinian conversion of the late Roman aristocracy. Scholars of late antiquity have focused on how fourth- and fifth-century texts present the ascetic transformation of the imperial elite. Feminist scholars have emphasized the revolutionary prominence of women among this illustrious group of abstemious saints.³ In fact, the late antique church did rely heavily on the benevolent patronage of great patrician matrons.⁴ Nonetheless, aristocratic women appear in hagiographical discourse not merely on account of their historical role in endowing the neophyte church, but because their conversion to the life of apostolic poverty enabled Christian rhetoricians to insert the evangelical leitmotif of inversion into their sacred biographies. By empowering those who could not enter the ritualistic precincts of the Senate, Christian writers augur the eschatological obliteration of political, social, and sexual hierarchies.⁵

Hagiographers also rework established imperial ideology by transforming loyalty to the state, emperor, and family into allegiance to a heavenly kingdom and to a spiritual family comprised of Christ, the saints and martyrs, and the church.⁶ Much of Roman law was directed at maintaining familial inheritance, but patrician Christians purposely obliterate ancestral properties and precious objects to impoverish their heirs.⁷ Hagiographers refashion building projects, donatives, almsgiving, and other republican and imperial forms of civic philanthropy into pious contributions to the cults of saints and martyrs. Church writers convert the political and ceremonial travels of the imperial family (*itinera principum*) into Christian pilgrimage.⁸ For women, love of a heavenly groom, Christ, replaces devotion to an earthly husband, and patrician authors modify the feminized classical virtues of chastity, humility, and piety into Christian *charismata*.⁹

*Helena: Madonna of a New Empire*¹⁰

The textual turning point for the refashioning of secular, imperial ideology into charismatic, Christian rhetoric is Eusebius of Caesaria's *Vita Constantini* (c. 337). In the *Vita Constantini*, the bishop of Caesaria places the tumultuous political events of the early fourth century within the larger rhetorical framework of the death of the pagan empire and the rebirth of a Christian *basileía* on earth. In 312 CE, a celestial vision of a blazing cross and an inscription, “In this sign you shall conquer (*toúto nika*),” inspired Constantine to defeat his imperial rival, Maxentius, at the Milvian Bridge in Italy.¹¹ Constantine's sacred biographer, Eusebius, recasts the emperor's victory over his enemies and his subsequent metamorphosis as a Christian emperor within the context of a universal exorcism, the apocalypse, and the resurrection.¹² Constantine's defeat of his imperial rivals parallels the apocalyptic warrior angel's binding of the devil for one thousand years (Revelation 20.1–3). His triumph purges evil from the world, resurrects the God-centered *gloria* of the empire, and ushers in a Christian *pax Romana*. Eusebius describes Constantine as a “heavenly messenger of God” whose bejeweled presence dazzles the imperial court.¹³

The bishop of Caesaria, however, mitigates Constantine's militant, apocalyptic Christianity by including the life of the emperor's widowed mother, the Augusta Helena. Helena's philanthropy, humility, and ministry to the poor humanize Eusebius's supernatural portrayal of the divine Constantine.¹⁴ According to Eusebius's account and her post-Eusebian legend, Helena transforms Jerusalem into a Christian city and miraculously

finds the relics of Christ's passion.¹⁵ Fourth- and fifth-century sacred biographers recreate the historical persona of the elderly Augusta as a charismatic archaeologist whose excavations in Palestine fulfilled the prophesy of New Jerusalem: John "saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21.2).¹⁶ Her journey to Palestine and her construction of several basilicas in Jerusalem and Bethlehem motivate subsequent pilgrimages by members of the imperial family and other patricians.¹⁷ Eusebius's brief *vita* of the emperor's mother is one of the most influential models for later hagiographical depictions of charitable widows, empresses, and Germanic queens. By the ninth century, the legend of Helen's *inventio* of the holy cross was read aloud in western monasteries, read individually by erudite lay persons, and performed publicly during liturgical festivities surrounding the feast-day of the *inventio crucis*.¹⁸

Eusebius of Caesaria places the *vita* of Helena within the broader context of the *Vita Constantini*, and his narrative appeals to a diverse audience of both civic-minded pagans and Christians. Eusebius's Constantine embodies Roman filial duty, and his Helena personifies the deferential *pietas* of Roman matrons. At the same time, however, Eusebius connects the imperial pair with Christ and Mary: the bishop praises Helena for her obedience to the will of God, her "God-loving acts,"¹⁹ and for giving birth to the Christ-like Constantine. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–386), Ambrose of Milan, Paulinus of Nola (c. 354–431), Socrates (c. 380–450), and Sozomen (early fifth century) expanded on the Eusebian account of Helena's pilgrimage to Palestine, emphasizing above all Helena's miraculous discovery of relics of the passion.²⁰

Helena appears in Book Three of the *Vita Constantini*, after a lengthy description of her son's discovery, cleansing, and restoration of Christ's sepulcher.²¹ In Eusebius's version of the Helena legend, the Augusta furthers the work already begun by her son. Helena embarks on an unprecedented pilgrimage to the Holy Land (c. 326) to venerate the holy places associated with Christ's life and passion. There she dedicates and decorates two churches in Palestine, at the Cave of the Nativity and on the Mount of the Ascension.²² She also places a statue of Christ on the Mount of Olives and constructs oratories on the summit.²³ According to Eusebius, the emperor augments Helena's philanthropy by offering gold, silver, and embroidered hangings to the new basilicas. In addition to overseeing the construction of basilicas associated with the birth and death of Christ, Helena tours the eastern provinces, where she dispenses alms to the poor

and frees prisoners and political exiles.²⁴ Eusebius assures his readers that Helena’s *itineraria* are undertaken in the full grandeur of imperial authority, although Helena dresses in humble attire and mingles informally with the crowds of pious who come to worship at the Constantinian shrines.²⁵ Helena dies at the age of eighty (c. 329) with Constantine at her side; the emperor honors his mother with a lavish funeral and buries her in the imperial tomb.²⁶

Eusebius’s hagiographical depiction of Constantine’s mother serves a variety of didactic and political purposes. The bishop connects Helena’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the more traditional *itineraria principum* of the imperial family.²⁷ Her sojourn refocuses the spiritual attention of the empire on Jerusalem and on Christ’s passion and resurrection. She is the active campaigner for Constantine’s New Jerusalem. Because Helena, unlike Constantine, could travel without an armed escort, she exemplifies the charitable side of the new dynasty.²⁸ Eusebius includes the short *vita* of Helena within the life of Constantine to soften the militant life of the emperor. Her pilgrimage is one of healing and resurrection, thereby implicitly countering the narrative of violence and political chaos that dominates the *Vita Constantini*.

The bishop also fashions the imperial pair as Christ and Mary to further the rhetorical strategy of the birth of a Christian empire. Helena focuses her philanthropy on the two biblical places associated with the Madonna—the nativity at Bethlehem and the resurrection at Jerusalem. Helena, like Mary, gives birth to a godly son who honors her according to scripture.²⁹ The Christ-like Constantine defeats his depraved adversaries in emulation of the book of Revelation’s account of the vanquishing of the devil. At the same time, Eusebius praises Constantine’s filial piety and portrays Helena praying for her son and grandson in traditional Roman fashion. As presented by Eusebius, the figure of Helena is an appealing one for Christians and non-Christians alike. Her piety, humility, and philanthropy establish the hagiographical prototype for sacred portraits of aristocratic women, and her *itineraria* in the Holy Land establish Christian pilgrimage as an essential aspect of women’s sanctity.

The hagiographers who elaborated on Eusebius’s abbreviated *vita* of Helena revise her mythical life in order to concentrate more fully on her connection with the relics of Christ’s passion and her steadfast faith. The legend of the discovery of the holy cross first appears about twenty years after Eusebius’s *Vita Constantini* in the liturgical writings of Cyril of Jerusalem.³⁰ Cyril’s *Catecheses* (c. 350) details Jerusalem’s unique Lenten and

Easter liturgical rituals. The bishop of Jerusalem was an important promoter of religious travel to the Holy Land.³¹ In his *Catecheses*, Cyril claims that already by the mid-fourth century the wood of the cross had been distributed throughout the world, but he does not name the elderly Helena as instrumental in the dispersion. Its universal dispensation, the bishop states, is further proof of the efficacy of the resurrection.³² Cyril's liturgical presentation of the salvific wood of the cross probably inspired later Christian writers to connect Helena's imperial pilgrimage to Jerusalem with the legend of the *inventio crucis*. One of the most detailed western accounts of Helena's charismatic excavation of the holy cross is by Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who included a brief *vita* of Helena in his larger work, the *Oration on the Death of Emperor Theodosius* (395).³³

Ambrose inserts the sacred life of Helena into the *De obitu Theodosii oratio* because he wanted to compare Emperor Theodosius's wife, Flaccilla, to Constantine's mother.³⁴ According to Ambrose, Helena travels to Jerusalem and surveys the places of the Lord's passion. The Holy Spirit inspires her to study the sacred topography and to unearth the holy cross. She journeys to Golgotha and begins an ecstatic conversation with the devil, whom she accuses of obscuring the *vexillum salutis*, the "standard of salvation." Ambrose uses the exchange between Helena and Satan to reinforce the importance of the Virgin Mary in the process of redemption; Helena warns the devil that he will be conquered by Mary, mother of the triumphant one (*triumphator*), who would eventually vanquish evil through his death on the cross. Helena compares her discovery of the sacred cross with Mary's birth of Christ: "Just as the holy woman gave birth to the Lord, I shall deliver his cross. I shall elevate the divine standard (*divinum vexillum*) from the ruins as medicine (*remedium*) for us sinners."³⁵

Helena then orders the holy ground of Golgotha to be excavated, after which three crosses (*patibula*) and the inscription INRI ("Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," John 19.19) appear amid the debris. The Holy Spirit reveals to the Augusta which of the three is Christ's cross, the "medicine of immortality" (*remedium immortalitatis*).³⁶ Helena also unearths two nails of the crucifixion; she weaves one into a horse's bridle fastening and the other into a crown of precious gems. Helena sends both the diadem and the bridle fastening to Constantine to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah: "There shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'Holy to the Lord'" (Zechariah 14.20), as well as that in the Psalms: "Thou dost set a crown of fine gold upon his head" (Psalm 21.3). Ambrose is clear about Helena's role in the Christian refashioning of the Roman empire: "The

Holy Spirit visited Mary so that Eve would be liberated: the Spirit also visited Helena so that emperors would be redeemed.”³⁷ Mary is the *mediatrix gratiae* of humanity, while Helena is the mediator of grace for the imperial family and the universal empire. Ambrose names the emperor’s mother as the chosen vessel of God’s work and as the salvific force in Constantine’s life. Constantine triumphs over the persecutors of the faith, and his mother’s discovery of the “medicine of immortality” heals the divided empire. By weaving the nails of the cross into Constantine’s crown and horse bridle, the two symbols of the emperor’s judicial and military power, Helena insures that her son’s rule will follow Christ’s precepts.³⁸ Ambrose thus appropriates Eusebius’s sacred portrait of Helena and reinterprets the legend in terms of Marian theology and the salvific force of the cross.

Later Christian theologians and historians further Ambrose’s exegesis of the *inventio crucis* and Helena’s role as the *mediatrix gratiae* for the empire. In the early fifth century Paulinus of Nola, a Christian bishop and poet, received an unusual gift. According to Paulinus’s *Epistle 31* (402), the remarkable holy woman, Melania the Elder (d. 410) brought the bishop a piece of the holy cross from Jerusalem.³⁹ This charismatic souvenir of the Holy Land inspired the bishop to ponder the spiritual significance of the *lignum crucis* and Helena’s role in its miraculous discovery. Paulinus elaborates on Ambrose’s metaphorical presentation of Helena as the mediator of grace for the empire, claiming that Constantine “deserved to be the prince of the princes of Christ as much through the faith of his mother as through his own.”⁴⁰ Helena, like the charitable widow commended by Jesus for impoverishing herself to enrich God, emptied the imperial purse to embellish the House of God.

Paulinus duplicates Ambrose’s account of the charismatic excavation of the three crosses. Paulinus, however, uses a miraculous event and not mere inspiration by the Holy Spirit to verify Christ’s cross. Helena orders that each of the three crosses be placed on the body of a dead man. The first two crosses fail to revive the body, but the third resurrects the corpse just as Jesus had animated Lazarus.⁴¹ Paulinus claims that the cross is only exhibited publicly during the festival of Christ’s passion, but that some pilgrims are allowed to see it on a private basis. According to Paulinus, the bishop of Jerusalem also reserves the right to distribute fragments of the wood as gifts to important pilgrims, including Melania the Elder. Paulinus asserts that the wood of the cross is divided on a daily basis but that its weight miraculously never diminishes. His presentation of the legendary life of the Augusta Helena, like Ambrose’s, symbolically transforms Con-

stantine's widowed mother to the status of the charitable widows of sacred scripture. The imperial matron's devotion to the dead body of Christ and the material remains of his crucifixion also emphasize women's connection with the ritual care of Jesus' body. Finally, Helena, like the Madonna, carries the hope of universal salvation within her in the form of the Christian emperor, Constantine, and her discovery of the "medicine of salvation" results in the miraculous distribution of the healing wood of the cross.

Two Constantinopolitan ecclesiastical historians, Socrates and Sozomen, also embellish the *cultus* of Helena, and they incorporate many of the narrative constructions found in Ambrose's *De obitu Theodosii oratio* and Paulinus's *Epistle 31*.⁴² According to Socrates and Sozomen, celestial dreams guide Helena to Jerusalem, where she destroys a statue of Venus and a pagan temple and unearths the three crosses. Both Socrates and Sozomen claim that Helena discerns the true cross by curing a dying woman with it. Helena encloses part of the cross in a silver case at Jerusalem, and she sends the remaining section to Constantinople. Constantine, according to Socrates, places the *lignum crucis* in a public statue of himself to protect the capital city. And, he states, after Helena dedicates churches at Jerusalem and Bethlehem, she prays in the company of pious nuns and ministers to them at table.⁴³ Sozomen adds that, while Helena is in Jerusalem, she gathers together the holy virgins of that city, orders a feast to be held in their honor, waits upon them at table, and washes their hands.⁴⁴ Later Roman empresses, in imitation of Helena's humble service-piety, humanize the Christian monarchy by visiting the sick, nursing the maimed, and working in soup kitchens in Constantinople.⁴⁵ The image of the imperial woman who ministers to virgins and feeds the poor would influence later depictions of early medieval royal women who supposedly engaged in similar domestic activity.

Hagiographers recreated the Helena legend to magnify a growing Christian interest both in pilgrimage to the Holy Land and in the efficacy of the relics of the passion. By the time of Socrates and Sozomen, the pious matron of Eusebius's narrative had been transformed into a charismatic holy woman. Eusebius, Ambrose, Paulinus, and the two eastern historians compare Constantine and Helena to Christ and Mary, and they humanize the imperial family and the empire through the dutiful life of the Augusta. Her discovery of the holy cross parallels the Virgin's birth of Christ in that both acts miraculously propagate universal redemption. According to her *vitae*, Helena is a charismatic mediator of grace for the empire. Eusebius, however, is not concerned with the tangible remains of the cross of the

crucifixion. For him, the artistic symbol of the New Empire is the *labarum*, the military standard adopted by Constantine after his vision of the cross in the sky. Constantine’s obligation, imposed from heaven, was to rescue the empire, hence his focus was necessarily political and public. Helena’s equally sacred task was to restore the physical cross to the Christians of the empire, to pilgrims of all degrees in Jerusalem. For Constantine, the cross was a warrant of imperial redemption, whereas for Helena it was medicine for sinners. For the emperor, the cross was a weapon, and his later biographers incorporate the nails of the crucifixion into the emperor’s armor, but for Helena it represented the restorative powers of the “wood of salvation.” In Eusebius’s hagiographical discourse, the actions of the emperor and his mother—militant and humble, political and devotional, triumphant and charitable—together represent the ideal of the Christian empire.

Paula: Roman Virtues and Christian Charisma

In the 380s the noble Roman woman Paula emulated Helena’s journey to the Holy Land. Jerome, Paula’s close friend and spiritual advisor, recorded her pilgrimage and her pious life in an *epitaphium* that he composed some twenty years after her journey.⁴⁶ His account of Paula—no doubt heightened and idealized to suit his exegetical purposes—describes her transformation from a self-indulgent patrician to a philanthropic recluse. He uses the *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae* (404) to display brilliantly the Christian rhetoric of inversion, the reworking of Roman Republican virtues, and the comparison of patrician women to the charitable widows of holy scripture.⁴⁷ Jerome presents Paula’s sacred biography in the form of a letter to her daughter, Eustochium, who was also an ascetic. Jerome’s narrative of Paula’s life employs the classical genres of funeral elegy, panegyric, and biography.⁴⁸ Like Suetonius, the biographer of the Caesars, Jerome arranges his *vita* topically, focusing on family, voyages, administration, and personal habits, each of which he inverts in the service of Christian rhetoric. In many respects, Jerome’s symbolic chronicle overturns classical gender constructions: Paula abandons her children, makes an independent pilgrimage to Egypt and the Holy Land, constructs monasteries in Bethlehem, studies languages and scripture, administers a religious community, and engages in rigorous *askesis*. Jerome, however, moderates this radical portrait of his disciple’s spirituality by introducing the image of the chaste widow from sacred discourse, Pauline directives on the role of women in the church, and the theology of the cosmetic.

Jerome begins his *Vita Paulae* by detailing the holy woman's splendid aristocratic lineage. Paula's family, the exegete states, is the blood kin of the scions of the Republic, the Gracchi and Scipii, and the *Iliad*'s Agamemnon. Paula marries Toxotius, also from a senatorial family, and gives birth to five children. After the death of Toxotius, Paula dedicates herself to the life of self-abnegation. Jerome depicts her imitation of the charitable widow praised by Christ. Paula depletes her ancestral inheritance and engages in spectacular acts of charity, for, as Jerome exclaims, "what dying poor man did she not wrap in her own vestments?"⁴⁹ And like the wealthy women in the book of Kings, the gospels, and Acts, Paula provides sanctuary for important holy men who attend Roman church councils.⁵⁰ These men inspire her to travel to the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. Along with her daughter, Eustochium, she departs from Italy in the mid-380s.

Paula's *itineraria* to Pontia, Cyprus, Antioch, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nitria in Egypt fit the symbolic pattern of other charitable women's journeys to the sacred sites of Christian history.⁵¹ She visits the island of Pontia and prays at a shrine dedicated to the early patrician martyr, Flavia Domitilla, who had been banished by Domitian because she was a professed Christian.⁵² Paula, Jerome claims, tours the cells that had been inhabited by Flavia during her "long martyrdom."⁵³ The patrician widow then visits her spiritual mentor, Bishop Ephiphanius, in Cyprus. While in Cyprus, Paula frequents the local monasteries and bequeaths money to each.⁵⁴ She then travels to Antioch in search of another famous holy man, Paulinus, after which she leaves Antioch riding a donkey instead of being carried by eunuchs.⁵⁵ From Antioch, she continues to the Holy Land where the proconsul of Palestine offers her official lodging, which she refuses in favor of a stark cell. In Palestine she tours the holy places of Hebrew and Christian scripture, particularly sites associated with biblical women, such as Caesarea, where the four virgin daughters of Philip prophesied (Acts 21.8–9), Diospolis, where Peter raised the charitable widow Dorcas (Acts 9.36–41), the home of Mary and Martha, who sheltered and served Christ (Luke 10.38–42), and the well where Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman (John 4.7–30). Like Helena before her, Paula focuses on places associated with the birth, ministry, and resurrection of Christ. She journeys to Emmaus, where the resurrected Christ appeared to his disciples (Luke 24.13–53), and she visits Christ's sepulcher, the holy cross, the scourging column, and the stable of the nativity.⁵⁶

During her pilgrimage, Paula experiences a number of ecstatic visions. As she stands before the cross, she beholds the body of the dead Christ

hanging upon it.⁵⁷ She kisses the boulder that the angel had rolled away from the tomb (Matthew 28.2; Mark 16.3–5; Luke 24.2–3; John 20.1). In the Holy Sepulcher, the matron licks the cold stones upon which Christ’s corpse had lain.⁵⁸ In Bethlehem, Paula mystically envisions Jesus’ early life, from his birth to the flight into Egypt. Obviously, early pilgrimage was more than a visual experience; it involved all of the senses and often resulted in a ritual absorption of the sacred events that had occurred at the pilgrimage sites.⁵⁹ For Paula, the Holy Sepulcher, the cross, and the Cave of the Nativity were all “living icons” of the faith where mystical experience continuously recreated sacred narrative.⁶⁰

After her vision of Christ’s birth and resurrection, Paula sails to Egypt to visit the Egyptian God-men at Nitria, where a throng of ascetics and bishops greet the austere matriarch.⁶¹ She visits the cells of numerous hermits, and Jerome declares that she perceives Christ in the countenance of each one. After her tour of the humble dwellings of the great heroes of the desert, Paula returns to Bethlehem, where she lives in a hostel, wears the garb of a simple servant, and refuses to enter the Roman baths. She sleeps on the hard ground and covers her body with a goat-hair blanket. In Bethlehem, Paula serves as a spiritual mother for the noble women under her charge, while in her convent, she studies Hebrew, Greek, and theology.

In 404, the fifty-six-year-old Paula takes to her bed with a serious illness. Her daughter Eustochium nurses her mother both physically and spiritually, alternating between Paula’s chamber and the Cave of the Nativity, where she prostrates herself and prays to Christ to allow her to accompany her mother in death. Jerome is present when Paula makes the *signum crucis* over her lips and commends her spirit to the heavenly bridegroom.⁶² Her funeral is a lavish affair, attended by the bishop of Jerusalem, priests, monks, and virgins, who chant psalms in Greek, Latin, and Syriac. After a week-long ceremony, Paula is buried beneath the church located next to the Cave of the Nativity.⁶³ Jerome informs the virgin Eustochium that her mother’s life was not merely one of self-abnegation, it was a life of slow martyrdom.⁶⁴ At the end of the *vita*, Jerome bids farewell to Paula, telling the dead woman that his little *epitaphium* will be a monument that will outlast those built from precious metals.⁶⁵

One of the main preceptive purposes of Jerome’s *Life of Paula* is to overturn the classical *topos* of the pious Roman matron. By inverting the traditional norms of the Roman aristocracy, Jerome presents a radical portrait of his spiritual pupil. Paula’s holy life represents a vindication of Christ’s teaching that “you cannot serve God and wealth” (Luke 16.13).

The literary construction of the ideal classical matron centered on women's role in the family, which involved worshipping family cults, caring for a husband, rearing children, and maintaining the estate.⁶⁶ Jerome remakes this traditional family-centered *topos* into a God-centered, charismatic model. The hagiographer begins with a description of Paula's noble lineage, but then states that her rejection of this illustrious, Republican genealogy glorifies God. She reluctantly produces children for Toxotius, but in doing so she fulfills Jerome's teaching that marriage is acceptable because it produces more virgins for the church.⁶⁷ Jerome asserts that Paula "preferred Bethlehem over Rome and having fled her golden dwelling, she exchanged it for a shapeless one formed of vile mud."⁶⁸ She forsakes her *domus* to go on a pilgrimage, just as she replaces affections for her earthly husband with love for a divine groom who calls out to her: "Arise my love" (Song of Songs 2.10).⁶⁹ Her most intimate physical experiences occur in Christ's tomb where she rolls about on the floor in an ecstatic frenzy.⁷⁰

Two of Paula's children, Pammachius and Eustochium, took up the life of self-abnegation, and it is to them that Jerome addresses post-mortem eulogies of their mother.⁷¹ Her granddaughter, "little Paula," Jerome proclaims, is destined to follow Paula's charismatic life, for even as a baby she miraculously sang Alleluia from her cradle.⁷² Paula's maternal instincts, however, are focused not on her children but on her spiritual disciples and on the Baby Jesus, whom she mystically envisions sleeping in his cradle in Bethlehem.⁷³ Jerome professes that the widow's abandonment of her children was "against nature" (*hoc contra iura naturae*); yet in doing so, Paula adheres to Christ's celestial commandment to forsake relations and property to earn life eternal (Mark 10.29–30).⁷⁴

Jerome's most dramatic reversal of the classical *topos* of the Roman matron is his depiction of Paula's impoverishment of her heirs. Roman legislation insured the smooth transfer of property and incomes between generations, but by ignoring ancestral custom, though not legal obligation, Paula earns treasure in heaven.⁷⁵ Jerome emphasizes that Paula knowingly deprives her children of their inheritance and leaves the pious Eustochium in debt.⁷⁶ The Roman matrons of classical discourse also practiced philanthropy and expended vast sums on widows, orphans, and the poor. Jerome ridicules such women for lavishing money on flatterers and living in luxury.⁷⁷ In contrast, Paula's charity is unmitigated and uncontrolled. She intends to become a beggar. In an excess of zeal, she even borrows more money at interest to fuel her insatiable desire to throw off the burdens of wealth.⁷⁸ In a short time, her appearance and habits reflect Paula's squalor.

dering of her family's wealth. She exchanges her patrician silks for rank goat hair, neglects the baths, and reduces her body to squalor. She refuses a soft bed in favor of an animal-hair mat and fasts to remake her aristocratic body into a vessel of repentance. Paula prefers God's professional poor—hermits, monks, and virgins—over senators. She even rejects the hospitality of the proconsul of Palestine, an old family friend.⁷⁹ Paula studies Hebrew, scripture, and the patristics, neglecting classical poets and grammarians. Her death, funeral, and burial further alienate the matron from her Roman ancestry, as she is entombed not in a family mausoleum but with Christ in Bethlehem. Paula's mourners include her spiritual family (comprised of bishops, nuns, monks, and the poor), who bemoan the loss of their “mother and nurse.”⁸⁰ Jerome thus uses the traditional genre of funeral eulogy to applaud Paula for rejecting the values of the Roman *domus* and embracing those of Christ's sepulcher.⁸¹

Throughout the *vita* Jerome equates Paula to the charitable women of the Bible. Like the widow of Zarephath and the wealthy woman of Shunem (1 Kings 17.8–13; 2 Kings 4.8–10), Paula offers her Roman *domus* to traveling holy men, and she supports monasteries in Cyprus, Egypt, and the Holy Land. In Jerome's rendition, she is the poor widow whom Christ praises for her charity, for Paula “disinherited herself upon earth so that she might find an inheritance in heaven.”⁸² Paula, who ministers to the poor and instructs her virgins on clothwork, is also the Roman personification of the Hebrew charitable woman who spins wool and extends her hand to the destitute (Proverbs 31.19–20).⁸³ Jerome compares Paula to the widow Dorcas from Acts; during Paula's funeral ceremony “the widows and the poor showed the garments that Paula had given them,” just as Dorcas's mourners displayed her handmade garments to the apostle Peter (Acts 9.36–42).⁸⁴

This homiletic image of Paula also reinforces the pastoral epistles' commandments concerning the role of women in the church. Jerome describes Paula as submissive and silent, welcoming the scriptural authority of men.⁸⁵ Her symbolic life personifies the teachings of 1 Timothy (2.11–12): “Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.” 2 Timothy (3.6–7) warns that certain women are easy prey for profligate preachers who entice “weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.” Jerome states that a depraved heretic had attempted to seduce Paula by attacking infant baptism and bodily resurrec-

tion. Paula wisely refused to confront the apostate and begged the learned Jerome to intervene on her behalf.⁸⁶ Both Paula's exegetical modesty and her recourse to the wiser male conform to Jerome's notion of the evangelical commandments concerning Christian widows: "She must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way" (1 Timothy 5.10). She is the opposite of the impious widow described in 1 Timothy (5.5–6), who is "self-indulgent" and therefore "dead even while she lives." In fact, the *Life of Paula* teaches other aristocratic women how to eradicate feminine self-indulgence and remake the patrician body into a vessel of grace.

Jerome's concluding lesson in the *Vita Paulae* concerns the patristic theology of the cosmetic. Paula's life is spiritual medicine (*remedium*) for the extravagance of classical Roman matrons because her philanthropy and *askesis* eliminate women's natural propensities toward bodily sin. As a master of cosmetic rhetoric, Jerome claims that Paula ravaged her body to punish her flesh for its former adherence to avarice and self-indulgence. Paula reportedly told Jerome that she must disfigure her face since it had once been painted with rouge and white lead; that she must mortify her body, which had enjoyed years of sensual gratification; that she must scar her cheeks with a river of tears to obliterate hours spent in merriment; that she must don a mantle of fetid animal hair as penance for her former opulent garb; and that she must now serve Christ as she had formerly satisfied her earthly husband.⁸⁷ Jerome uses the ascetic image of Paula to counter the negative stereotype of the self-indulgent matron, who veils the outside of her body with jewels and fine silks but leaves her soul full of "rotting bones."⁸⁸ Asceticism reduces Paula's body to a skeletal state in the service of reversing Eve's fall from grace and exterminating the postlapsarian feminine vices of vanity, avarice, and lust. Jerome's depiction of the Roman matron mortifying her flesh is a lesson for his patrician contemporaries on the necessity of refashioning the body into a vessel of repentance.

The *Life of Paula* transforms traditional Roman virtues into Christian *charismata* and recasts the charitable patrician as one of the wealthy widows of sacred discourse. It features the submission of women to the authority of holy men and reinforces the patristic theology of the cosmetic. Like Eusebius's *Life of Helena*, Jerome's sacred biography of Paula appeals to ascetic-minded Christians and educated Romans alike, but its resonance with those audiences was surely subtle and disturbing. On the one hand, a Roman reader would have admired aspects of Paula's piety. Eustochium,

the only offspring who labored with Paula, is shown by Jerome to exemplify ancestral filial obligations of “obedience, support, and company.”⁸⁹ Paula herself is depicted as invariably chaste, charitable, and respectful of male authority.⁹⁰ In this regard, she is a Christian counterpart of Lucretia, the ideal matron of Roman literature, whose piety is evident in her weaving and whose vow of chastity leads to her death.⁹¹ Even the ascetic-minded Christian would have to acknowledge that certain Roman virtues, the fruit of an ancient pagan tradition, spoke to Christian concerns. On the other hand, a Roman audience certainly would have been deeply scandalized by Paula’s behavior—abandoning her children, squandering their inheritance, forsaking her patriarchal *domus*, and exalting Bethlehem over Rome, the *caput mundi*. Jerome clearly intended to shock a conventional Roman audience with his depiction of a matron of the senatorial order licking the stones of Christ’s sepulcher and writhing ecstatically on its floor. Nothing could be more alien to the moderation and discretion treasured by traditional Romans.

Jerome’s portrait of Paula thus embodies considerable tension, appealing in a certain way to Roman pieties in the very act of affronting them. Paula’s sacred fiction is structured both to evoke recognition of continuity between Roman values and Christian commitments and to force the reader to contemplate the abyss between the old way of life and the new dispensation. The historical Paula, whatever she may have been like and whatever she actually did, disappears irretrievably in that gap.

Melania: Through the Eye of a Needle

The *Life of Melania the Younger* extends the spiritual motifs established in the sacred biographies of Helena and Paula. The *vita*, by her confessor, the priest Gerontius, takes the hagiographical *topos* of the abstemious, charitable woman to its charismatic extreme while adhering to the patterns of classical panegyric, biography, and Hellenistic romance.⁹² Melania was a member of one of the most prominent senatorial families of the late Roman Empire and her grandmother, the “thrice-blessed” Melania the Elder, was an ascetic, pilgrim, and a patron of monasticism in Jerusalem.⁹³ Gerontius, who accompanied the younger Melania on her travels to Africa, Constantinople, and the Holy Land, provides an allegorical account of one patrician woman’s descent into symbolic poverty and extreme asceticism. More than any other late antique holy woman’s life, Melania’s *vita* usurps sacred *topoi* of the male priesthood. Melania engages in spectacular acts of philan-

thropy and astounds the imperial family with her miraculous way of life. Yet Gerontius appears to be ambivalent toward his benefactor's unrivaled patronage of the church, and he consistently pairs her charitable deeds with Jesus' teachings on the dangers of attempting to buy salvation (Matthew 6.1–2, 7.13; Luke 18.24–25). In the *vita*, Gerontius is criticizing the spirit of Melania's *caritas*: "If I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13.3).

Gerontius begins the *Vita Melaniae* by claiming that his heroine had attacked the sins of senatorial rank by entering the angelic life and by despising the world.⁹⁴ Melania's external way of life and physical appearance exemplify her piety; she engages in intense vigils, sleeps on the ground, mistreats her body, and wears inexpensive clothes. In her youth, Melania vows herself to eternal marriage to Christ, although her family forces her at age fourteen (c. 399) to marry the patrician, Valerius Pinian.⁹⁵ Melania tries to persuade Pinian that they should remain chaste, but he insists she bear two children to inherit the couple's vast patrimony. Melania gives birth to a girl, and afterwards begins to mortify her flesh by refusing to go to the baths and by wearing rough goat hair under her patrician silks. Pinian persists in his desire to have another heir, and bishops advise Melania that she should adhere to the apostle Paul's injunction that those who are already married should uphold their wedding contract (1 Corinthians 7.27). Melania submits to the will of the holy advisors and becomes pregnant once again. She spends the night before giving birth in her private oratory, where she keeps the vigil for the feast of Saint Lawrence and prays to God that he deliver her from worldly burdens.⁹⁶ The next day, she gives birth to a son who immediately dies. Melania thereupon becomes so despondent that Pinian begs God to restore his wife's health. Her depression impels Pinian to take a vow of chastity, and when their daughter dies, the couple becomes zealously ascetic. Melania celebrates her long-awaited charismatic life by renouncing all her lavish silk clothing.⁹⁷

Both parental opposition to their new, abstemious lifestyle and the threat of barbarian invasions cause Pinian and Melania eventually to flee Rome. The twenty-year-old Melania and her slightly older husband move into one of their family's villas outside the city. On the suburban estate, the couple begin their *askesis* and dress in sordid clothing.⁹⁸ The hagiographer explains that they do not immediately imitate the austerities of the Egyptian and Syrian desert, preferring instead a gradual taming of their pampered flesh.⁹⁹ They open their *domus* as a hostel for travelers and, like the Augusta Helena, they visit the sick, relieve the sufferings of the poor, and free prisoners. The hagiographer reports that Pinian's brother, Seve-

rus, attempts to thwart the couple's dissipation of the family's patrimony by inducing their suburban slaves to revolt.¹⁰⁰ Melania, through the mediation of holy bishops, gains an audience with the Empress Serena to head off slave disturbances in her various estates, which are scattered throughout Spain, Italy, Africa, and Britain.¹⁰¹

Serena, moved by the physical appearance of the austere dressed Melania, agrees to intervene on her behalf and informs Emperor Honorius of the machinations of Pinian's brother. The emperor decrees that all of Melania's and Pinian's provincial properties would be sold by local officials, with the couple receiving the total proceeds.¹⁰² In return for Serena's patronage, Melania and Pinian offer her gifts, but the devout empress responds that receiving benefactions from saints is an act of sacrilege because it robs the poor of future alms.

Gerontius itemizes Melania's and Pinian's rejection of the burdens of enormous wealth and their spiritual rebirth as God's poor. Pinian's annual income is 120,000 pieces of gold in addition to the payments from the sale of Melania's properties. The sacred biographer enumerates the charitable distribution of the holy couple's entire income.¹⁰³ He even describes with lavish detail one of their most luxurious estates, which included sixty-two households, expensive statues, and an enormous pool from which bathers could view the sea.¹⁰⁴ The saintly patricians sell this palatial estate just before the barbarian invasions,¹⁰⁵ and Melania uses the proceeds to purchase monasteries, decorate altars with silks and silver, and buy islands, which she then turns over to holy hermits.¹⁰⁶ When the Gothic warlord Alaric enters Italy and ravages Roman suburban estates, Melania and Pinian flee to North Africa. Before they reach the coast of Africa, they assist an island that has been blockaded by the Goths by offering the invaders a ransom of 2,500 gold coins. They also provide an additional 500 coins to feed the starving inhabitants.¹⁰⁷

Pinian and Melania arrive in North Africa (410), sell their remaining property there, and engage in ministry to the poor. When they visit important bishops, including Augustine of Hippo and Alypius of Thagaste, they are advised to use their money to build and finance monasteries in North Africa in order to obtain a “memorial in both heaven and earth.”¹⁰⁸ They choose to live in Alypius's town of Thagaste, where Melania occupies herself with the study of scripture, the decoration of Alypius's church with costly goods, and the construction of two large monasteries.¹⁰⁹ Upon completion, Melania provides each monastery with an income to support 80 monks and 130 nuns.

According to Gerontius, this largess finally relieves Melania of most of

her earthly riches. At last she can devote herself to matters of the spirit and to governing her convent at Thagaste. He recounts the saint's fasts and meals of moldy bread, her devotion to scriptural exegesis, her fascination with the *Lives* of the desert fathers, her strict administration of the women's community, and her sackcloth bed and vigils.¹¹⁰ Amid all this activity, her *askesis* rivals that of the most austere hermits of the Syrian desert. She immures herself in a small wooden box and prays without being able to move.¹¹¹ In Gerontius's *vita*, Melania is an awe-inspiring ascetic, a proficient scribe, a linguist, a model abbess, and a dedicated missionary. Gerontius maintains that the humble Melania describes herself as a "useless servant," fit only to wash the feet of saints.¹¹²

Melania rules over her monastery in Thagaste for seven years before she decides to take up the *via crucis* to Jerusalem (c. 416–417). Pinian, Melania, and her mother, Albina, stay at the Constantinian church of the Holy Sepulcher and employ local officials to distribute alms on their behalf.¹¹³ By this time, Gerontius emphasizes, the couple is so liberated from the burden of riches that they consider enrolling themselves on the church's poor registry.¹¹⁴ Eventually Melania determines to make the journey to the Egyptian desert to witness the ascetic lives of Christ-like hermits. She finances the pilgrimage with money from the liquidation of her Spanish holdings.¹¹⁵ Before leaving for Egypt, Melania instructs her mother to build a small cell on the Mount of Olives so that she can move into it when she returned to Jerusalem. In Egypt, Melania distributes gold to God's unblemished anchorites, visits the cells of famous holy men, and meets with the abbot of Tabennisi. She also makes the arduous journey to the birthplace of Christian monasticism, Nitria, where the holy fathers welcome her "as if she were a man."¹¹⁶

Upon her return to Jerusalem, Melania secludes herself in the tiny cell her mother has completed on the Mount of Olives. Sitting on sackcloth and ashes, she refuses all visitors except Albina, Pinian, and her cousin Paula, who come to seek Melania's spiritual advice.¹¹⁷ Gerontius claims that Melania endures fourteen years of strict *askesis* in this narrow vault and that, when she finally emerges, he sees huge lice fall from her sackcloth.¹¹⁸ After the death of her mother, Melania establishes a women's monastery in Jerusalem, humbly relinquishing the administration of the ninety-member convent to another woman.¹¹⁹ The convent is devoted to the conversion of prostitutes to the life of holy chastity, and Melania gives sermons to the sisters on the virginity of the soul and the requisite spotlessness of the brides of Christ.¹²⁰ She also erects an oratory and altar in the monastery

and obtains the relics of the prophet Zechariah, the protomartyr Stephen, and the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.¹²¹

While the holy woman is busy with these various projects, her earthly husband and spiritual brother, Pinian, dies (c. 432). Melania enshrines his remains in an aposteleion she had constructed, and she descends into it to pray and keep vigils for four years. Gerontius contends that when Melania emerges from this period of intense mourning she directs him to procure stones for a new monastery to be built on the Mount of the Ascension.¹²² She also commissions the monks of the Mount of the Ascension and the aposteleion to chant the liturgy for both Albian and Pinian. After completion of the second *coenobium* in Jerusalem, Melania and Gerontius travel to Constantinople to convert the holy woman’s uncle Volusian, a former Roman prefect.¹²³

On their way to the capital of the eastern empire, Melania enacts the first miracle of the *vita*: her prayers impel an official in Tripoli to allow the pious entourage to transport animals to Constantinople without proper documentation.¹²⁴ Gerontius observes that Melania later heals the Empress Eudocia’s twisted ankle, exorcizes two female demoniacs, and miraculously aborts a dead fetus.¹²⁵ Melania remains in Constantinople for forty days, during which she enjoys the hospitality of the imperial chamberlain (*prepositus sacri cubiculi*) and impresses the imperial court with her charismatic appearance. Melania carries through the conversion of her uncle Volusian, and, immediately after his baptism and sudden death, an intense pain in her foot miraculously disappears. Indeed, Melania so inspires the imperial court that the Empress Eudocia subsequently visits her in the Holy Land.¹²⁶ At Sidon, Eudocia meets Melania at the martyrion of Saint Phocas, which was traditionally believed to have been the abode of the humble Canaanite woman whom Christ converted (Matthew 15.22–28). Eudocia acknowledges Melania as her spiritual mother and accompanies her back to Jerusalem, where the empress, in imitation of the Augusta Helena, mingles with Melania’s virgins as if she were one of them.¹²⁷ The empress’s submission to Melania’s spiritual authority underscores the saint’s elevated status in the eastern court.

At the end of the *vita*, Melania embarks on her last pilgrimage. She and her cousin Paula journey to Bethlehem to participate in the festival of the Holy Nativity.¹²⁸ Upon her return to the convent in Jerusalem, Melania preaches at the festival of the protomartyr Stephen. Before she dies (December 31, 439), she entrusts Gerontius with the supervision of her male monasteries.¹²⁹ She is entombed in the oratory she had dedicated to

the holy martyrs. The mourners spend the night singing psalms and reading from scripture, and Gerontius assures his audience that the apostles, prophets, and martyrs welcome this extraordinary matron into their celestial choir.

The *Life of Melania the Younger* is simultaneously an unprecedented account of one woman's authority within the late antique church and a striking narrative of the inversion of classical gender precepts. Melania's childhood misogamy and later vow of chastity contravene the celebrated maternal role of Roman patrician women. Her marriage is unconventional by late antique standards in that she controls her own destiny, finances, and travel. The most fundamental gender reversal in the *vita* occurs in the relationship between Melania and her husband. The hagiographers of widowed female patrons, such as Paula, Helena, and Olympias, were not forced to consider how to portray the relationship between husband and abstemious wife. In the *Life of Melania the Younger*, the hagiographer reduces Pinian to a passive subordinate who follows his wife's lead. Pinian is the "helpmeet" (*prostatis*) of the charismatic Melania, and there is no corresponding *Life of Pinian*, however saintly he supposedly was. Melania's husband barely utters an independent word after his conversion. In contrast, Melania hectors Pinian into celibacy, lectures him on asceticism, and upbraids him for his spiritual weaknesses. Melania is the charismatic leader revered by empresses and bishops, while Pinian is merely enrolled as one of her obedient acolytes.

By rigorously punishing her flesh with strict fasting, rough goat hair, and night vigils, Melania's *askesis* parallels the austerity of desert hermits. She imprisons herself in cells so small that she can barely move. In Alexandria, a holy prophet recognizes Melania as housing the spirit of a saint.¹³⁰ Her reputation as a prophet and saint enables her to perform such salvific miracles as exorcism. She also possesses the capacity of literally becoming the crucified Christ. When Melania's unbaptized uncle Volusian falls ill, she miraculously absorbs his pain into her own body, and, with his baptism and death, it vanishes in the same wondrous way. The symbolic meaning of this passage of the *vita* is that Melania, like Christ on the cross, experiences physical suffering to redeem sinners.

As does Jerome in the *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae*, Gerontius uses Melania's *vita* to chastise the profligacy of secular women. He implicitly attacks the indulgent, lavish lives of Roman women by itemizing Melania's austere wardrobe.¹³¹ Melania reportedly grows to despise silk garments so much that merely touching them causes her skin to break out. She dresses

in Antiochene-style garments which are less expensive than the Cilician style, and she is buried in what hagiographers regarded as vestments of salvation and virtue—the tunic, veil, belt, and hood of important saints.¹³² In fact, Melania’s acceptance of the theology of the cosmetic refashions her body into a vehicle of conversion. Gerontius reports that it is Melania’s austere appearance that moves the imperial court, inspires the empresses Serena and Eudocia, and converts her uncle Volusian to Christianity. He also uses Melania’s audience with the Empress Serena to reinforce Pauline strictures concerning women’s demeanor. According to the hagiographer, members of the senatorial class uncovered their heads when they visited the imperial family, but Melania violates this convention to obey Paul’s directive that “any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head” (1 Corinthians 11.5).¹³³ Melania also refuses to change her sordid mantle, appearing before the empress instead in her salvific garb. Gerontius thus radically inverts ancient Roman custom, while championing Pauline legislation concerning women’s physical appearance.

In Melania’s *vita*, Gerontius is not so much praising the saint for her independent adoption of ascetic dress as he is using the theology of the cosmetic to admonish all women for sinful indulgences. Melania’s fierce rejection of fine apparel is therefore a backhanded acknowledgment of women’s propensity toward decadent self-gratification. Her refashioned ascetic attire belies an ancient *topos* in sacred writings of the adorned woman as the embodiment of sin. Her exchange of silk for goat hair stands as a kind of universal repentance for her sex, and Gerontius emphasizes that her veil and hood of haircloth served as punishments for her past life of luxury.¹³⁴ Her lice-ridden sackcloth validates her renunciation of the world and, like the sinful harlots who end their lives in claustrophobic cells, Melania immures herself in a cramped wooden box to repent for her past life. It is significant that her convent specializes in the conversion of sinful women to the life of renunciation. According to Gerontius, Melania believes that her substitution of haircloth for silk is akin to an exorcism of feminine profligacy.¹³⁵

Gerontius’s model of female sanctity stresses almsgiving, a conventional way for ancient women to wield power. This model, of course, was also shaped by the mythological life of Helena, which made the construction of basilicas and endowment of holy places a requisite part of a holy woman’s *vita*. But Jesus had warned his disciples about the perils of inappropriate philanthropy: “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father

who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you" (Matthew 6.1–2). In his *vita* of the saint, Gerontius suggests that Melania was indeed sounding her own trumpet.

The hagiographer also provides such an abundance of detail about Melania's wealth and charity that it belittles her benevolence. Gerontius reports that Melania and Pinian had an income of over 120,000 pieces of gold, that their house was so expensive that not even the empress could afford to buy it, that the couple effortlessly bought entire islands, and that they shrewdly sold almost all their western properties at the very moment of the Gothic invasions. In fact, Melania's dissolution of her ancestral landholding could be described as a clever real estate liquidation.¹³⁶ Melania's enormous wealth allows her to privatize the holy: she owns relics and altars, builds private chapels and *oratoria*, buries Pinian in her own aposteleion, and possesses several monasteries.¹³⁷ One sometimes has the impression reading Gerontius's narrative that North Africa and the Holy Land were virtually littered with the consequences of her philanthropy. Indeed, the hagiographer implies that Melania was buying her way into the sacred without a clear sense of the contradictions of her position and the inappropriate nature of her actions.

Although charity was a legitimate, albeit resented, method for ancient women to gain influence, it is clear from Gerontius that Melania employed her riches to enforce her will. She bribes servants not to reveal that she is avoiding the baths, pays young women to be chaste, and offers money to pagans who convert to Christianity.¹³⁸ As a wealthy woman accustomed to compliance with her desires, she evidently did not consider whether the behavior she purchased from the prostitute and the pagan reflected a commensurate change of heart. The first minor miracle of the *vita*, the release of Melania's animals in Tripoli, reinforces the image of the saint as an obdurate philanthropist. Gerontius reports that both Melania's striking sanctity and a generous tip encouraged a local official to let her beasts go.¹³⁹ Gerontius asserts that the devil had taunted Melania about buying her way into heaven, a warning that may reflect the anxieties he felt about her position as a free-spending pauper.¹⁴⁰

Gerontius declares that Melania and Pinian experienced a vision in which they painfully pass through a narrow slot in a wall. Clearly, this vision derives from Jesus' warning about wealth as an obstacle to heavenly life: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many" (Matthew 7.13). It is very difficult "for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!

For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18.24–25). The vision of Melania (and Pinian) is relevant to the most unsettling story Gerontius relates about the patrician saint. During Melania’s pilgrimage to the cells of famous anchorites in Egypt, she attempts to give them gold when she sees their meager possessions.¹⁴¹ When one indignant recluse asks Melania what purpose gold possibly could serve in the desert, she advises him to use it for alms. In response, the hermit cruelly chastises the heroine of the *vita* by pointing out that the poor did not retreat to the desert to then beg from ascetics who had rejected earthly wealth. Defiantly, the anchorite throws Melania’s gold coins into a river. It is rare indeed for hagiographers to rebuke their own saints, who are generally admonished only for their behavior before conversion. Equally unusual is the word Gerontius uses to describe Melania’s attempt to give alms to God’s poor. He asserts that she gave gold to the hermit Hephestion, “on account of spiritual craftiness (*dià panourgias pneumatikēs*).”¹⁴² The gospel of Luke (20.23) applies the term *panourgia* (cunning, craftiness, trickery) to the spies of the scribes and the chief priests, and Paul (1 Corinthians 3.19) uses the term to denounce those who place credence in the wisdom of this world and not the next. This revealing exchange between holy woman and venerable hermit suggests that Melania’s understanding of the ascetic vocation is tenuous and that her connection with the inner circle of great holy men negligible.¹⁴³ Gerontius even goes so far as to liken the zealous benefactor to vain patrician women who travel to the Egyptian desert accompanied by a majestic retinue of eunuchs, animals, and churchmen.¹⁴⁴

The hagiographer’s ambivalent view of Melania was surely conditioned by his inclusion in her retinue and, having been appointed supervisor of her male monasteries, a recipient of her generosity. He is with her when she usurps the authority of the episcopacy by procuring relics of saints and martyrs, installing their remains in altars, reclothing sacrificial tables with silks, and preaching in her own sacred basilicas. He watches her order her family’s silver collection to be turned into lavish church altars and observes her bestowal of these sacrificial tables on the deserving. He also sees great bishops such as Augustine and Alypius put in the dubious position of being the clients and economic dependents of a wealthy ascetic through Melania’s financial patronage of North African basilicas and monasteries.

The most peculiar aspect of Gerontius’s *vita* of Melania is his constant applause of the saint’s poverty and asceticism in the context of her appar-

ently lifelong failure to rid herself of riches. Time and again, the hagiographer proclaims that Melania can finally embrace the ascetic life, all her wealth having been benevolently dispensed, only subsequently to portray his heroine acquiring more relics, endowing more temples, and paying for her retinue to visit yet another congeries of hermits. Even after fourteen years in a narrow vault on the Mount of Olives, Melania emerges not only with enormous lice on her sackcloth but with the wherewithal to endow a monastery, attend court in Constantinople, and obtain the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. Not long after she and Pinian contemplated enrolling themselves on the poor registry of the church in Jerusalem, she journeys to the Egyptian desert where she tries to foist gold on holy men. According to Gerontius, Melania was like the poor woman who offered Jesus her last copper coins, yet the hagiographer also informs his audience that Melania had fifty gold coins when she died—a princely sum at the time. In short, Gerontius's sacred fiction makes clear that Melania's "poverty" was more symbolic than real.

Of course, Gerontius may simply have been careless of consistency, and he may have been so impressed by the fortune Melania gave away that fifty gold coins seemed like a relative pittance. But it is more likely that Gerontius was truly ambivalent about his benefactor's deeds and thus could not avoid introducing tensions into his portrait of her. From his perspective, Melania did heroic good work and kept the ideal of the ascetic life before her. Despite her good intentions and relentless generosity, however, she failed to make the ultimate commitment that would have abolished the vices she formally abhorred. She was determined to force herself painfully through the eye of the needle, dispensing largess as she went, heedless of Jesus' teachings about the "narrow gate" and the devil's warning about buying her way into heaven. In doing so, she could not avoid becoming a scandal to the male hierarchy of the church, upon whom she bestowed so much charity. She never abdicated the role of a wealthy patrician woman bent on good deeds. With its ambivalence and inconsistencies, the *Life of Melania the Younger* stands as a late antique lesson on the depths of self-indulgence and superficiality that even the holiest of women must overcome to achieve their own redemption.

The *vitae* of Helena, Paula, and Melania highlight the prominent role of patrician women in the formulation of early Christian pilgrimage, the orchestration of the cult of the dead, the establishment of Bethlehem and Jerusalem as primary monastic sites, and the transmutation of Roman Re-

publican values into Christian *charismata*. According to her legendary biographies, Helena became the unique arbiter of Christ's passion through her miraculous discovery of the wood of the cross. Her hagiographical image also served to humanize the militancy of Constantine's dominion over Rome: she is the Mary of a new empire, who dispenses the medicine of salvation throughout Christendom. The philanthropic and humble example of Helena influenced subsequent lives of patrician women who assumed the radical life of self-abnegation. Jerome's *Life of Paula* provides one of the most elaborate models of the inversion of Roman virtues: Paula destitutes her heirs, chooses mystical union with Christ over earthly marriage, reduces her elegant body to a withered corpse, and exalts the ascetics of Bethlehem over the senators of Rome. Gerontius's *Life of Melania the Younger* is an extraordinary account of how one patrician woman's philanthropy, missionary fervor, and salvific powers were accommodated within a male hierarchy.

These three lives, however, temper the iconoclastic power of Christian women by featuring the theology of the cosmetic, Pauline strictures on women's status in the church, submission to male authority figures, and the imitation of biblical women who serve holy men. The Helena myth reworks the discourse of the charitable widow of Hebrew and Christian scripture. Paula is the Roman Martha who ministers to holy men at table and the charitable wife of the book of Proverbs who extends her hand to the poor; she obeys Paul's pastoral epistles' commandment that women remain silent and submit to the authority of men. In contrast, Melania's life underscores the danger of female usurpation of male power. As a patrician philanthropist, she places holy men in the unusual position of being clients of a woman. Gerontius pairs Melania's outstanding ascetic deeds with her misguided charity. Finally, all three lives use the theology of the cosmetic in order to present their saints as vessels of repentance for the female sex. The *vitae* of Helena, Paula, and Melania serve as spiritual medicine for other aristocratic women who cling to the vices of vanity, lust, and self-indulgence.

Civilizing Merovingian Gaul

The Lives of Monegund, Radegund, and Balthild

IN HOLY SCRIPTURE WOMEN EXPRESS their piety through domestic service to godly men and the impoverished.¹ In John (12.1–2), Martha, the sister of Lazarus, feeds Jesus and the apostles: “Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.” Early medieval hagiographers reproduce the biblical image of the faithful serving woman to underscore the conventional piety of female saints, such as Radegund of Holy Cross, who became the “new Martha” (*nova Martha*) of Merovingian Gaul: “She did not cease from feeding the weak and blind food with a spoon. Two women were present with her for this purpose, but Radegund alone ministered at table. Like a *nova Martha*, she bustled about until the brothers were both rich in their cups and convivial.”² Merovingian sacred biographies, including Radegund’s, couple iconoclastic depictions of women’s charismatic and institutional authority with more traditional motifs of domesticity, charity, and claustration.

In their *vitae* Merovingian women usurp many of the sacerdotal, pastoral, and administrative functions of the male hierarchy.³ Hagiographers portray cloistered women as mystically performing the sacrificial action of the mass and baptizing the sick. Holy women bury the dead, hear confession, absolve sinners, and, like priests, they preach, teach, and proselytize. They impose communal penance on monasteries and even entire villages, and they administer the cult of the dead by procuring relics and building saints’ shrines. The tombs of female saints consecrate both material objects and human beings. The same sacred biographers who so exalt female saints, however, also characterize women’s piety within the framework of a feminized household and folkloric domesticity.⁴ Female Merovingian

saints demonstrate their steadfast faith in God by spinning altar cloths, baking bread, and making candles. They cheerfully perform menial tasks, such as cleaning latrines, dusting altars, and washing saints' tombs; they nurse, bathe, and feed the poor. And, by rejecting royal dress and jewelry in favor of haircloth, they conform to the theology of the cosmetic. Their *vitae* promote women's submission to male altar servants and highlight the cloister as the locus of female sanctity. Merovingian hagiographers illustrate their hallowed lives with the unique imagery of a Germanic population that is in the process of blending with a Gallo-Roman one; thus, Merovingian *vitae* present hagiographical motifs in a singular way. Yet the hagiographers who created the corpus of female *vitae* in early medieval Gaul employed biblical rhetoric to achieve goals similar to those of their Mediterranean and eastern counterparts—the empowering and bridling of female sanctity.

Fifth- and sixth-century Gaul witnessed the fusion of northern Germanic tribes with a Romanized Gallic population that was ruled both by bishops and Frankish military leaders who eventually became the *reges Francorum*.⁵ The Merovingians (i.e., the royal dynasty that ruled what is now France, Belgium, and the Rhineland between 450 and 751) accelerated the process of making saints, sanctifying entire families, and creating monastic communities.⁶ Monasticism in early France can be traced to the diffusion of eastern ascetic principles through an aristocratic group of fifth-century Romanized Gauls who lived in Aquitaine and the Rhône Valley, and along the Mediterranean coast. Gallo-Roman aristocrats, some of whom had received ascetic instruction in Egypt and Constantinople, introduced eastern-style monasticism at a handful of major sites, including Tours, Marseilles, Lérins, Arles, Jura, and Poitiers.⁷ The Gallo-Roman episcopacy gradually established control over the various ad hoc monastic organizations that developed around the cults of famous saints, such as Martin of Tours, founder of Marmoutier and Ligugé.⁸ Bishops sought to incorporate all individual ascetics into the structure of the church hierarchy to prevent the creation of unofficial sects that might evolve around the magnetic personalities of non-consecrated holy women and men. Under episcopal and royal guidance, monasteries became critical units of political, economic, and missionary activity.

Whereas early medieval male houses tended to be concentrated in the countryside, walled towns, urban basilicas, and private households safeguarded neophyte female communities.⁹ The first significant women's cloisters in Gaul were located at Marseilles, Jura, Vienne, Tours, Arles, and Poitiers, and these early houses were often connected to renowned

male institutions, such as that of John Cassian's at Marseilles. The influential bishop and monastic regulator, Caesarius of Arles, composed the primary monastic rule for women in early medieval Francia. Several important Gallo-Roman cloisters followed Caesarius's women's *regula*, including those at Arles, Poitiers, Metz, and Laon.¹⁰ The rule imposed strict isolation and claustration on the nuns and emphasized working wool, modest dress, and mild asceticism.

Several historians of early monasticism have noted that women's access to financial resources and donatives has always been more limited than men's, and that female houses depended on both the patronage of royal women and the post-mortem cult of saintly founders.¹¹ Frankish queens may have been attracted to the life of organized asceticism because they already served as secular caretakers of vast estates and dispensers of the royal fisc, and the cloister provided them the opportunity to expand their diplomatic, financial, and administrative skills.¹² Since philanthropy was such an essential component of female sanctity, royal nuns who had private access to ancestral estates, treasures-hoards, and political alliances were viewed as ideal saints.¹³ Queens ruled women's communities with royal authority and endowed them with both land and portable treasures.

Royal women were also instrumental in the promotion of renowned cults, including those of Saint Genovefa of Paris and Saint Martin of Tours. Queen Chlotild (d. 544), the wife of the founder of the Merovingian dynasty, Clovis I (c. 465–511), established a shrine for Genovefa and constructed several women's monasteries before she retired to the basilica of Saint Peter at Tours.¹⁴ A number of important Frankish holy women, including Queen Chlotild, Papula, Ingitrude, Radegund, Ultragotha, and Monegund, chose sites associated with the legendary Martin of Tours to inspire their spiritual lives.¹⁵ In particular, Radegund's foundation at Poitiers became one of the most influential women's houses of early medieval Gaul, and her community developed into such an important diplomatic and religious center that it challenged the authority of a local bishop.¹⁶ By the sixth century, women had no hierarchical alternative to male church offices, and the cloister had become the institutional place for female ascetics. Merovingian hagiographical *vitae* played an important role in promoting the cloister's spiritual efficacy for repentant noble women.

Monegund: Mediator of Celestial Medicine

In the 590s, the hagiographer and bishop Gregory of Tours completed a compilation of Gallic saints' lives known as the *Liber vitae patrum* (book

of the lives of the fathers).¹⁷ Curiously, Gregory chose to include the life of one woman among the twenty sacred biographies of illustrious bishops, abbots, and ascetics. Gregory's interest in the holy woman's life stemmed from the promotion and celebration of his familial see at Tours.¹⁸ According to Gregory, Monegund made the pilgrimage to Tours only because of the prominence of the *cultus* of Martin.¹⁹ As sixth-century hagiographical texts attest, Martin's shrine had the power to captivate Christians not only in the Touraine but as far away as northern France, the homeland of Saint Monegund. Part of the rhetorical strategy of the *Liber vitae patrum* lay in the institutionalization of independent, charismatic holy women and men who had attached themselves to important shrines and basilicas.²⁰ Gregory therefore incorporated Monegund's autonomous life at Tours into the larger framework of the institutionalization of Martin's cult.

Gregory of Tours begins the *Vita Monegundis* with a description of the holy woman's former life in the world. Monegund is from the northern Frankish village of Chartres. She fulfills her parents' desire that she marry, and she eventually gives birth to two girls. When both daughters die from a fever, Monegund goes through intense mourning and uncontrollable weeping. According to Gregory, Monegund finds solace not in the comforting words of her husband, relatives, and friends, but in holy scripture; only the Bible inspires her to end her lamentations and inaugurate a life of penance.²¹ Monegund removes her mourning garb and immures herself in a narrow cell attached to her familial home. Gregory describes her vault as a desert-like ascetic tomb with only one window. In this oratory, the penitent spends her time renouncing the vanities of the world, rejecting her earthly marriage, and praying for the sins of both herself and the Franks. A domestic servant brings her barley flour, ashes, and water, from which Monegund makes bread. She distributes the remainder of the food from her household to the poor. Monegund's servant, however, abandons the duty of ministering to the saint to return to a mundane existence. Monegund therefore suffers five days without food until God miraculously sends snow (Exodus 16.14–15) from which she draws water to make her bread. After these initial healings, she deserts her husband and household at Chartres to travel to the basilica of Saint Martin at Tours.²²

On the way to Tours, Monegund lingers at the village of Esvres in the Touraine to celebrate the festival of Saint Médard of Soissons, whose relics were enshrined at the local basilica.²³ During the mass, Monegund miraculously bursts open a young girl's malignant tumor by employing the sign of the cross over the rotting flesh. She then makes her way to Tours, prostrates herself before the shrine of the blessed Martin, and moves into a cell

attached to the basilica.²⁴ She continues her desert-like rituals of praying, fasting, and keeping vigils. Strict enclosure endows her with the charism of healing, and her magnetic spirituality attracts a small crowd of female disciples who form a prayer community that supports itself by weaving mats and baking bread.²⁵ Monegund ends her life among her disciples, but before she dies she comforts them by placing them in the care of the blessed Martin and by blessing their oil and salt supply. The nuns use these *beneficia* to continue the salvific process begun by Monegund of healing the sick and the possessed. The community buries the saint in her cell, and her shrine becomes a focal point of pilgrimage and worship.

Gregory's ecstatic portrayal of the reclusive Monegund transcends traditional gender boundaries. The anchorite transforms her earthly body into a spiritual one in imitation of the greatest Hebrew and Christian holy men of antiquity. Like the renowned ex-soldier Martin of Tours, she heals using the Christian weapons of prayer and oil,²⁶ and, in imitation of the famous Gallo-Roman ascetic Germanus of Auxerre, she fashions her bread from a mixture of barley flour and ashes.²⁷ Her abandonment of husband, family, and native village of Chartres confers upon her the desert gifts of healing by laying on of hands and exorcizing by means of the *signum crucis*. Like the charismatic doctors of the desert, Monegund cures the diseased with herbal medicines. God feeds the saint in her oratory, just as divine power had nourished the prophets in the desert. Monegund feasts directly from God's grace and, in turn, she feeds other Christians.²⁸ She also weaves mats from interlaced twigs, and, in imitation of the desert fathers, she sleeps on coarse sacks. In desert fashion, the charismatic amma attracts a band of disciples who form a community around her cell.

In the prologue to the *vita*, Gregory compares Christian dogma to a "stable of celestial medicine." Monegund is thus a Christ-like dispenser of celestial medicine, for like a priest, she distributes grace to the Franks.²⁹ In fact, there are several eucharistic images in the *vita*. The bishop asserts that, by traveling to Tours, Monegund drinks from a "priestly fountain" and thereby is "able to lay open the avenue to the grove of Paradise."³⁰ The saint reconciles a blind female sinner to God's grace by miraculously healing her eyes with the *signum crucis*.³¹ She also blesses oil and salt, two elements used by the male priesthood to perform exorcisms and baptisms.³² Finally, her tomb functions as a consecrated altar wherein divine power sanctifies the many material objects and human bodies that come into contact with it.³³

In addition to presenting Monegund as a faith healer and desert-like ascetic, Gregory stresses her connection with the Hebrew Job, whose suf-

ferings signified divine favor. Medieval theologians interpreted Job's torment as a foreshadowing of the passion of Christ on the cross. Monegund, like Melania the Younger, initiates her religious retreat precisely at the moment of her greatest earthly ordeal, the deaths of her two daughters. In his *vita*, Gregory uses the mother's grief to transform her into a Frankish Job, for, like Job, she eventually recognizes her terrible loss as part of the divine plan. In response, Monegund disrobes, renounces her earthly family and marriage, and begins a life of penance. She symbolically enacts the verse from the book of Job (1.21): "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." She divests herself of her earthly possessions and reclathes herself, thereby evoking the image of self-baptism.³⁴ Monegund's *vita* functions as a prooftext that God creates *beneficia* from human suffering, for the Lord remakes Monegund, who was helpless to prevent the deaths of her children, into a faith healer. The didactic message in Gregory's *Vita Monegundis* is that God's grace triumphs over earthly sufferings and divine medicine prevails over temporal healing arts.

Although Gregory depicts Monegund as a Christ-like intermediary between paradise and earth, he also softens the independent charisma of his subject saint by situating her power within the institutional setting of the *cultus* of Martin of Tours. Indeed, in many ways, Martin is the cardinal figure of the *vita*. Gregory compares Martin and Monegund to Solomon and the queen of Sheba: "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all of her questions" (1 Kings 10.1–3). The biblical encounter between Solomon and the queen of Sheba provides a context for viewing the life of Monegund. In Gregory's redaction of the Hebrew legend, Tours becomes the "New Jerusalem," and Monegund undertakes her journey to seek the advice of the godly Martin, who thereafter serves as Monegund's spiritual director, answering "all her questions."

Dead altar servants miraculously counsel Monegund on her most significant actions. Saint Martin authorizes Monegund's abandonment of her husband, even though such a desertion violates Paul's teachings on marriage: "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives" (1 Corinthians 7.39).³⁵ She travels to Esvres to join in the religious festivals held in honor of Saint Médard of Soissons, and her unerring reverence for Médard endows her with the gift of healing a young girl of a deadly tumor. At Tours,

she attaches herself to the basilica of Martin, and her hermitage becomes the locus of her apostolic powers of healing and exorcism. Gregory emphasizes, however, that Monegund's healings do not overshadow those of the blessed Martin, for Monegund commands a blind woman not to seek a cure from her: "Does not Saint Martin live here, who each day shines with the work of his miracles? Go to him and pray that he may deign to visit you. For I am only a sinner; what can I do?"³⁶ While dying, Monegund entrusts her disciples to the care of Martin, their "shepherd."³⁷ After her death, Monegund miraculously instructs a blind man that he must seek a cure not at her shrine but at the basilica of holy Martin: "Go then to the feet of the blessed Martin and prostrate yourself in front of him."³⁸

The *Life of Monegund* presents the reader with a striking re-creation of desert asceticism within the context of an urban shrine in Gaul. In Gregory's sacred portrait, Monegund is a spiritual doctor who dispenses the medicine of heaven without clerical intervention.³⁹ Through the abandonment of both her marriage and her native town of Chartres, Monegund becomes a salvific force in the lives of the inhabitants of the Touraine. She cures the deaf and blind; and she blesses oil and salt, and these two elements of priestly baptism and exorcism continue to work miracles after her death.⁴⁰ Gregory represents Monegund's small cell next to the basilica of Saint Martin as a consecrated space. By crossing the threshold of Monegund's tomb, the afflicted "drink in the resurrection" and receive a divine cure. The saint's powers hallow both material objects and afflicted humans.⁴¹ In Gregory's portrayal, Monegund's authority seems to rival apostolic and priestly powers; but that possibility is undercut by the hagiographer's assurance that Monegund was part of a community busy with baking and weaving and that the saint limited her miracle working to healing the sick. Gregory also links Monegund's spiritual success to her intense identification with her mystical shepherd Martin.⁴² While certain aspects of Monegund's *vita* resemble those of the great ammai of the eastern deserts, the self-entombment of the ascetic was secured in an institutional setting dominated by male saintly authority. The *Vita Monegundis* was part of a process whereby Merovingian bishops were restraining potentially disruptive asceticism, particularly as practiced by females, by placing it under hierarchical supervision.

Radegund: The New Martha of Gaul

The *vitae* of the Merovingian Queen Radegund of Poitiers (c. 518–587) created an influential model of female piety for following generations of

noble and royal holy women.⁴³ In addition to the widely disseminated sixth-century text authored by the Italian poet and later bishop of Poitiers, Fortunatus, another seventh-century life of Radegund was written by Baudonivia, a nun of Holy Cross.⁴⁴ That both a woman and a man chronicle the life of this cloistered holy woman provides a rare opportunity to compare gendered accounts. In describing Radegund's independence and charismatic power, Fortunatus seems to be fitting the Frankish queen into the gender-inverted molds of a Merovingian Elijah, Samuel, and Christ.⁴⁵ He tempers these radical gender inversions, however, by rationalizing Radegund's most aggressive expressions of independence and by feminizing her miracle working. The female saint's life is thus rendered paradoxical by her male hagiographer's choice to couple the *topoi* of heroic martyrdom with folkloric domesticity. The bishop's Radegund on the whole resembles the charitable, domestic women servants in the New Testament and more closely fits the model of a Merovingian Martha than that of a great prophet. Baudonivia, who boasted that she had been "nourished from the cradle" by the queen, portrays a Radegund who is an astute politician, a destroyer of pagan shrines, and an active participant in the cult of the dead.⁴⁶ These male- and female-authored texts share many similar spiritual motifs, although the female version emphasizes Radegund's pastoral and administrative achievements whereas the male-authored text dismisses the queen's authority outside of the cloister and emphasizes her domestic duties within the convent.

Fortunatus begins his *Life of Radegund* by describing the saint's tumultuous childhood. When Radegund is about twelve years old, the Franks defeat her uncle, the Thuringian ruler, Hermanfred, and divide his household among themselves.⁴⁷ Radegund falls to the lot of King Chlotar, and the victorious Franks deposit her at the royal villa of Athiès in the Vernois.⁴⁸ At Athiès, Radegund receives an education in grammar and domestic labors, and she begins to train the children who are with her in the art of penance.⁴⁹ She lives at Athiès for about ten years before Chlotar marries her at Soissons. Fortunatus stresses, however, that after the wedding Radegund lives as an ascetic and is truly married not to Chlotar but to Christ. She dispenses the royal fisc to monasteries, independent hermits, and the poor. She transforms the villa at Athiès into a hospice for destitute and leprous women. During the course of her earthly marriage, she multiplies both her munificence and her self-mortification. Finally, she flees from Chlotar to Bishop Médard of Noyon-Tournai, who consecrates the queen as a deacon and veils her.⁵⁰ After her consecration, Radegund travels to a number of pilgrimage sites around the Touraine, including Tours, Candes,

and Saix. During this Gallic *itinera*, she increases her poor relief, nursing, and philanthropy. She eventually leaves Saix and constructs her own institution at Poitiers.⁵¹

At Poitiers, she moves into a small cell, where she fasts, prays, and wears sackcloth and ashes. She refuses the office of abbess in order to devote herself more fully to a life of humble service, just as Melania the Younger had refused to govern her own convent in Jerusalem. She also vigorously engages in the domestic chores of the convent and visits the diseased in the convent's infirmary. According to Fortunatus, Radegund's life embodies the ascetic discipline and household labors of the *regula* of Caesarius of Arles.⁵² Her self-entombment, *askesis*, and philanthropy bestow upon her the charisms of healing, exorcism, and resurrection. She dies at Holy Cross, and her piety, self-denial, and faith reportedly result in many post-mortem miracles at her shrine.

Bishop Fortunatus fashions the Merovingian queen into a woman-prophet, female-Christ, and Frankish martyr. Her ascetic and miraculous activity also parallel the famous *acta* of the male saints, Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre. Fortunatus endows her holy body with extraordinary charismatic powers and arresting acts of self-mortification. In fact, Fortunatus's Radegund engages in the most brutal ascetic rituals of any female Merovingian saint, and her putrefaction of the flesh rivals the charismatic authority of most early medieval male saints.⁵³ She achieves the status of superhuman martyr, institutional confessor, and grace-dispensing priest. The bishop's *vita* suggests that Radegund's self-martyrdom, liturgical usurpations, and miraculous activity invert traditional images of women's subservience.

Fortunatus evokes the image of martyrdom throughout Radegund's sacred biography, beginning with the story of her childhood abduction. He compares the child Radegund, captive at the Frankish court at Athiès, with the ancient Israelites, who were enslaved, subjugated, and oppressed by war. During her confinement at the villa of Athiès, Radegund becomes a child-martyr and pseudo-priest. She confides in her playmates that she desires to wear the crown of Christian martyrdom, and she commands the other children to construct a wooden cross and organizes them into a band of tractable penitents. Under Radegund's charge, the ritual procession of toddlers marches into the villa's oratory, surrounds the altar, and chants psalms. This unusual depiction of Frankish children's liturgical play has a eucharistic focus; Radegund, before leading her company into the basilica, stages a child's version of the last supper with table scraps and ceremonial

hand washing.⁵⁴ Like the child-Jesus (Luke 2.41–52), Radegund's true home is the Temple. Fortunatus uses the standard hagiographical *topos* of the wise child as evidence of Radegund's future sanctity, and, in doing so, he has Radegund impersonate the sacerdotal functions of the consecrated priesthood.

As an adult, Radegund's continual defiance of masculine authority inverts the traditional gender hierarchy of male-female. She abandons her earthly marriage in favor of a celestial union. As Christ's bride, she prefers praying on the cold ground next to the privy to sleeping in a royal bed, a scene depicted in the eleventh-century illustrated version of the *vita* (Figure 4).⁵⁵ She dons monastic vestments and persuades Bishop Médard to consecrate her as a deacon and to veil her. Her financial support of the male hierarchy and of monasticism places important holy men in the position of being the economic clients of a woman, while her desert-style punishment of her body rivals that of any Frankish holy man.

In imitation of the superhuman acts of the desert fathers, Radegund rigorously fasts, wears heavy chains, and brands her flesh with a red-hot crucifix. She cheerfully cleans latrines and punishes her body with coarse goat hair. Fortunatus provides gruesome details of her self-imposed corruption of the flesh. During Lent, she drinks only two pints of water and her throat becomes so parched that she cannot even chant the litany.⁵⁶ Her Lenten diet consists of roots and herbs, with bread reserved for Sundays. She thus suffers constantly from burning thirst and intense hunger. In preparation for Holy Week, Radegund squeezes massive amounts of blood out of her body by encasing herself in Syrian-style iron fetters that cut into her flesh.⁵⁷ Even though the stiff barbs of her hair cloth scrape the flesh off her limbs, she subjects them to further torment by carrying a basin brimming with burning coals. Like Germanus of Auxerre, Radegund sleeps on a bed of ashes and covers herself with a hair cloth.⁵⁸ Fortunatus proclaims that these terrifying feats of self-mortification mark the holy woman as a martyr even though the historical age of persecution has ended.⁵⁹

In Fortunatus's rendition, Radegund's grueling *askesis* empowers her with the wonder-working abilities of Martin of Tours, Michael the warrior-angel, and the prophet Elijah. She heals the blind by impressing the *signum crucis* on their eyes, expels demons by trampling on the necks of their victims, and resurrects the dead. Like Christ, she ministers to lepers, the poor, and the diseased. Fortunatus places her powers of healing in a sacerdotal context; Radegund cures the sick by immersing them in baths, a symbolic act which clearly recreates the baptism of catechumens.⁶⁰ A *monacha*

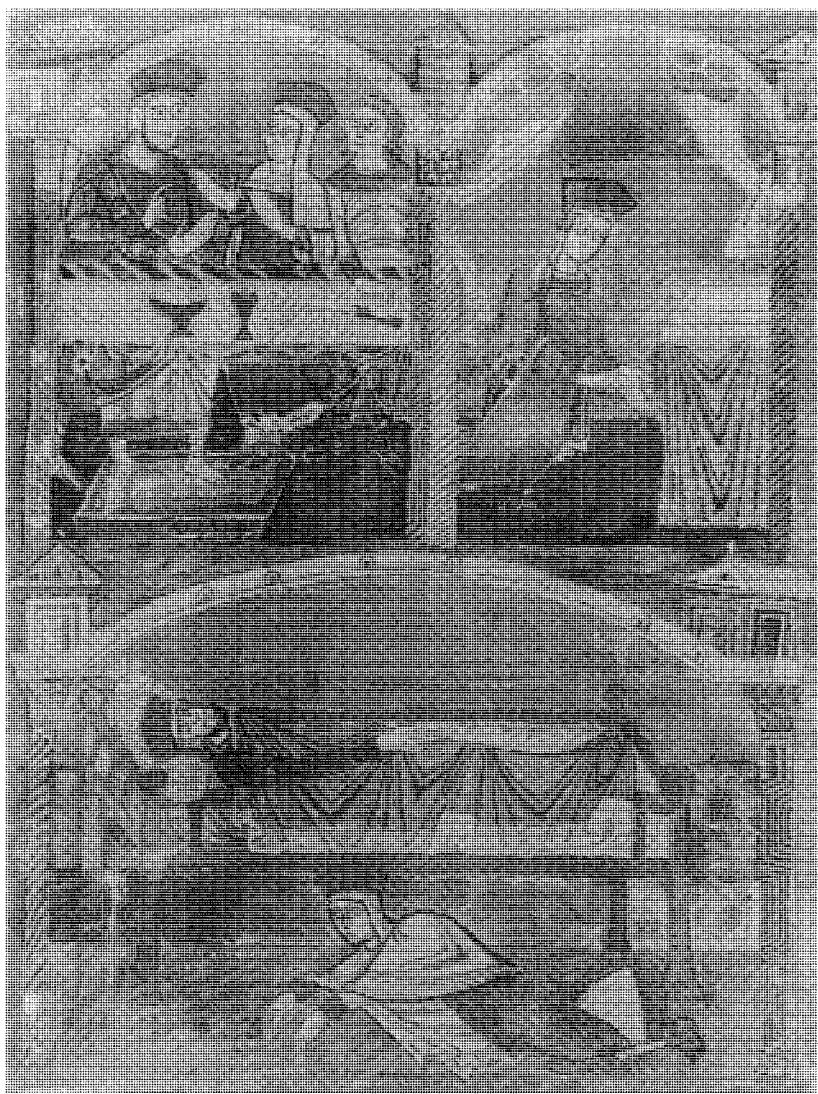


Figure 4. "Saint Radegund at the table with the king, praying in her oratory, and prostrate on the floor." Ms. 250, fol. 24r. End of the eleventh century. Bibliothèque Municipale, Poitiers, France. Giraudon/Art Resource, New York.

Animia, who suffers from a dropsical swelling, mystically envisions being baptized by the saint. Radegund comes to Animia in a dream and orders her to strip and lower herself into a bath. Radegund then pours oil over the sick woman's head and reclothes her in a new garment, after which Animia awakes from the dream in a state of pristine health. Like Radegund's actions, early baptism was comprised of prayer, exorcism, anointing, disrobing, bathing, and reclothing. These rituals were symbolic of the removal of postlapsarian flesh and the resurrection of the spirit.⁶¹ Just as Radegund's mystical baptism of Animia evokes priestly baptism, the banquets the queen gives for beggars and lepers involves her dispensing wine to the congregation in a quasi-liturgical manner.⁶²

Fortunatus exercises constraint, however, in his representation of Radegund as a powerful saint. He weakens the force of the queen's spiritual rebirth and rejection of her husband by suggesting that she was compelled to do so by the nature of her marriage. According to Fortunatus, Radegund's marriage to Chlotar was a *Raubehe*, or a Germanic "captive marriage," because the king acquired his future bride as a war trophy.⁶³ Radegund, who had wanted to remain chaste for her celestial groom, heroically cleanses her body after sexual intercourse. Fortunatus reports that Radegund would leave her husband's bed at night, put on a goat-hair mantle, and pray by the latrine to convince Christ that she was unadulterated.⁶⁴ Here, Fortunatus places Radegund's holy life within the framework of epic accounts of female martyrs who endure physical torture to preserve their bodily purity.

Fortunatus describes Radegund's request to be consecrated by Bishop Médard not to depict an influential holy woman but to justify the abandonment of her marriage. A number of historians have questioned the likelihood of Radegund's confirmation as deacon because sixth-century episcopal legislation had been passed to abolish the women's diaconate.⁶⁵ It is quite possible, then, that the hagiographer fabricated a formal title and institutional consecration to mitigate the queen's scandalous desertion of her husband, just as Gregory of Tours used the celestial sanction of Saint Martin to justify Monegund's abandonment of her marriage.⁶⁶ Fortunatus suggests that the consecration was hastily carried out because Chlotar's courtiers were ridiculing both the king and his peculiar bride.⁶⁷ Radegund's *imitatio Christi* had made her the object of derision among Chlotar's supporters who, according to the male hagiographer, used to joke that the king was married to a monk, not a queen.⁶⁸ Fortunatus's description of Radegund's consecration may not be an affirmation of

women's institutional authority; its inclusion in the narrative apparently attenuates Radegund's rebellion against the traditional female role of wife and mother by creating a title that would legitimate her independence.

A similar legitimization is at work when Fortunatus places Radegund's charismatic abilities only within a feminine, domestic, and even child-like environment. Radegund plays at being a priest like the boy-Samuel: "Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy girded with a linen ephod" (1 Samuel 2.18). Fortunatus draws on this image of the boy-prophet: "[Radegund] carried out these things in the manner of the little cleric, Samuel."⁶⁹ During her lifetime, she heals only powerless women and children. Even her emulation of the ecstatic abilities of Elijah and Martin of Tours involves the nursing and resurrection of infants. Only one post-mortem miracle of the *vita* involves the healing of a man, the secular official, Domnolenus, who suffers from a throat disease. Significantly, however, Radegund promises to cure Domnolenus only if he will agree to dedicate an oratory to the greatest of all male saints, Martin of Tours.⁷⁰ Radegund thereby serves as the "helpmeet" of Martin.

Like Gerontius with Melania the Younger, Fortunatus provides detailed descriptions of Radegund's philanthropy, claiming that even hermits could not hide from her charity, that she decorates the altars of pious men with gold and jewelry, and that she divests herself of all her wealth.⁷¹ She dispenses the royal fisc throughout Gaul, just as the Augusta Helena distributed the imperial treasury in the Holy Land, and, in imitation of Helena, Radegund secures the release of prisoners through political arbitration and miraculous intervention.⁷²

Fortunatus presents the queen's conversion to the life of radical asceticism through the hagiographical *topos* of changed garments.⁷³ He enumerates Radegund's rejection of the opulent clothing of the Merovingian aristocracy by providing the most elaborate literary account of Merovingian women's aristocratic dress.⁷⁴ She prostrates herself at the threshold of basilicas and places her noble costume on "the table of divine glory."⁷⁵ She commissions another holy woman, the *monacha* Pia, to design a special linen tunic with goat-hair lining. The *vitae* of both Melania the Younger and Radegund of Holy Cross suggest that charity and proper ascetic attire are integral aspects of feminine spirituality and serve to eradicate the association of women with self-indulgence. The reclothing of the Merovingian queen in fetid animal hair preaches to other women the necessity of throwing off the earthly body. Fortunatus, like Gerontius and Jerome, uses the theology of the cosmetic to feminize the spirituality of his saint.

Throughout the *vita*, Fortunatus circumscribes Radegund's charismatic asceticism within the domestic and feminine environment of the cloister. Instead of officiating at the altar, she cleans it with her tunic. She also scrubs the pavement surrounding the sacrificial table and, with great reverence, carries the sacred dust in her apron and places it outside the church. Fortunatus's Radegund is an ascetic housekeeper who miraculously finds dirt in the kitchen and uses her spindle, the symbol of her chastity and domesticity, to exorcize demons in the guise of mice.⁷⁶ She grinds flour, lights fires, and polishes the shoes of her nuns. Similarly, Martin of Tours, while he was still in the Roman army, cleaned the boots of his domestic servant and ministered to him at table.⁷⁷ Martin's hagiographer Sulpicius Severus, however, includes these examples of Martin's domestic piety primarily to validate his rejection of the military hierarchy and does not allow Martin's table ministry to dominate his *vita*, as Fortunatus does in his life of Radegund.

The queen also washes the hair of destitute women who come to her at the royal villa of Athiès, and she ministers to the poor by cleansing their skin, extracting vermin, and combing their hair. She prepares drinks for them, gives them new clothes, carves their meat, and wipes their mouths with napkins.⁷⁸ She rubs ointment on women lepers and kisses them on the face. She also bathes the feet of visiting holy men with warm water and serves drinks to them.⁷⁹ Fortunatus accentuates domestic imagery not only because Radegund's immaculate housekeeping reflects the cloister's interior purity of spirit but also because such household piety accommodates the imposing image of the saint within the biblical *topos* of contrite serving women. The hagiographer inverts the model of dynamic queenship by re-fashioning Radegund as a humble servant.

Radegund's performance of such household activities follows the evangelical pattern of women's domestic service to the apostles and to Christ. The synoptic gospels recount Jesus' resurrection of Peter's mother-in-law, who, immediately upon rising, waits upon the men (Mark 1.30–31; Matthew 8.14–15; Luke 4.38–39). The evangelists similarly present Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus, who dispenses food and drink to Jesus and the apostles, as the paradigm for women's service to men. Significantly, Fortunatus renames Radegund the "new Martha" (*nova Martha*) because of her domestic service to the apostles of Gaul.⁸⁰

Fortunatus's *Life of Radegund* illustrates the paradoxical treatment of holy women by sacred biographers. The male writer combines the gruesome *acta* of the saints and martyrs with folkloric domesticity and biblical

women's table ministry. Radegund's nursing, feeding, and philanthropy symbolically heal the endemic factionalism and violence of Merovingian politics; she, like Helena, is a *mediatrix gratiae* for the Frankish kingdom. In Fortunatus's sacred fiction, the saint usurps the liturgical and miraculous authority of the male priesthood, but only within the context of childhood play, the theology of the cosmetic, and miraculous housekeeping. Within this paradigm of female holiness, Radegund is a domestic martyr, with a *vita activa* which is distinctively feminine.

Both Fortunatus and the female hagiographer, the nun Baudonivia, employ the conventional representations of female piety, such as table ministry, claustration, and healing. The difference between the two texts is one of emphasis. Fortunatus focuses on the queen's activity as that of a Merovingian Martha, whereas Baudonivia recounts Radegund's life within the context of relic hunting, political arbitration, and pastoral duty.⁸¹ Both hagiographers use similar models: the *vitae* of Hebrew and Christian holy men and the lives of contemporary Gallo-Roman saints, including Martin of Tours and Germanus of Auxerre.⁸² They also replicate elements in the influential life of Saint Helena. Whereas Fortunatus's Radegund imitates Helena's philanthropy and domestic service, Baudonivia's Radegund duplicates Helena's role as a charismatic archaeologist and active missionary. Baudonivia's account highlights her mentor's contribution to the public vitality and power of the convent of Holy Cross and acknowledges its influence on the history of her own people. In order to achieve this goal, Baudonivia empowers Radegund and restrains the authority of the important men in her life, just as she ignores the male figures in the Helena legends to focus on the Augusta's independent acts.⁸³

Baudonivia suggests that, during her earthly marriage, Radegund is not a victim of sexual pollution but a model laywoman.⁸⁴ There is no mention in this life of Radegund's consecration as deacon by the Bishop Médard. Radegund finds her "helpmeet" in the person of the bishop of Paris, Germanus, who helps convince the ineffectual king that he will have to free his queen of her marital bonds.⁸⁵ The major focus of Baudonivia's *vita* is the queen's active ministry, imperial authority, and orchestration of the cult of the dead. In imitation of Saint Martin, Radegund destroys an ancient Frankish shrine (*fanum*) and converts the pagans who had defended it.⁸⁶ Fortunatus excludes from his sacred biography both Radegund's foundation of Holy Cross and her successful procurement of a piece of the true cross from the Holy Land.⁸⁷ In Baudonivia's account, however, Radegund is a Merovingian spiritual empress who uses her contacts with

the patriarch of Jerusalem and the Byzantine emperor to retrieve ornate editions of the gospels, the *lignum crucis*, and other relics of important martyrs. Baudonivia proudly proclaims that “what Helena did in the East, Radegund did in Gaul.”⁸⁸ Her relic hunting rouses the envy of the local bishop, Maroveus of Poitiers, who unsuccessfully attempts to block the arrival of the *lignum crucis* at Holy Cross.⁸⁹ Moreover, as Baudonivia recounts, Radegund’s charismatic powers protect the sacred boundaries of the cloister, such as when she exorcizes the devil in the guise of thousands of goats standing on the convent’s wall.⁹⁰ During her life and after her death, the queen’s miraculous power cures the diseased and the possessed. Her shrine and its associated *beneficia* consecrate all objects that come into contact with it, and her tomb-shroud (*pallia*) heals important church officials.⁹¹

Although Baudonivia underscores her spiritual mother’s political acumen and authoritative control over the relics of the cross, she nonetheless frames Radegund’s piety within acceptable rhetoric. Baudonivia offers a brief depiction of Radegund as a devout table-minister who bustles about as a servant.⁹² She replaces her fine linen with sackcloth and ashes and wears fingerless gloves made from old boots. She washes the feet of the destitute and cleanses them with her veil, but refuses to wipe them with her hair in accordance with the apostle Paul’s commandment that women should keep their heads covered (1 Corinthians 11.5–10).⁹³ In general, however, the female hagiographer’s portrayal of the Merovingian holy woman accentuates pastoral duty over domestic service. It may be that Baudonivia alludes to the queen’s household devotion primarily to make Radegund’s substantial authority more acceptable to a seventh-century audience that would expect the queen’s active ministry to be compatible with female domestic piety.

Balthild: A Royal Handmaid of God

The controversial life of the Anglo-Saxon slave and later Frankish queen, Balthild (c.630s–680), composed by an anonymous nun of Chelles, furthers the hagiographical motif of the authoritative woman as God’s humble handmaid (*ancilla Dei*). The hagiographer states that Balthild’s life fits the pattern of the charitable queen-saints of the sixth century, including Chlotild, Ultragotha, and Radegund.⁹⁴ In fact, Fortunatus’s *Life of Radegund* is the primary model for the life of the seventh-century Merovingian queen. Balthild’s hagiographer tells us that she ascended the Frankish so-

cial hierarchy from the position of household bondswoman to be the most important queen of her century.⁹⁵ After the death of her husband Clovis II in 657, Balthild continued his program of ecclesiastical and monastic reform. She acquired relics, revitalized the cults of early Gallic saints, appointed abbots and bishops, and supported several prominent cloisters including Chelles, Corbie, Jumièges, Fontanelle, Logium, Luxeuil, and Faremoutiers.⁹⁶ Balthild acts as a peacemaker among the Frankish provinces of Neustria, Austrasia, and Burgundy, and as regent for her son, Chlotar III, king of Neustria, until she left politics for a life of holy retirement at Chelles.⁹⁷

Balthild's *vita* presents a remarkable account of an authoritative female whose regency combined sacred and secular aspects of monarchy, mediating both court politics and the hallowed cult of the dead. Balthild's *Hausherrschaft* ("houserule") empowered her to distribute the royal patrimony to the poor, arbitrate factionalism among the nobles, and ceremoniously receive important diplomats and churchmen. As a royal nun, she continued to manipulate political alliances, clothe the poor, and minister at table. She exploited the *Hausherrschaft* model of early medieval queenship to extend her political influence over both the church and nobility.⁹⁸ This formidable woman, however, was not without her detractors. Nearly contemporary hagiographical sources denounce Balthild as a new "Jezebel," who initiated the murder of nine bishops and poisoned Frankish politics with her machinations.⁹⁹ Indeed, it is likely that the queen's retirement to the convent at Chelles was less an act of pious devotion than a forced political exile.¹⁰⁰ Balthild's hagiographer, however, refashions the queen's controversial political life by subordinating worldly authority to her domestic piety.

Balthild, like Radegund, begins her spiritual journey as a captive in a noble Frankish household (c. 641).¹⁰¹ According to the hagiographer, the Anglo-Saxon slave's pious demeanor and refined manners attract the attention of Erchinoald, the mayor of the palace of Neustria.¹⁰² Erchinoald selects Balthild as his personal cupbearer, and, after the death of his wife, he attempts to marry her. The hagiographer contends that Balthild escapes this earthly marriage because she is already dedicated to her heavenly spouse Christ—a consideration that apparently did not prevent her eventual marriage to the Merovingian king, Clovis II (c. 648).¹⁰³ The latter appoints the holy man Genesis as Balthild's spiritual overseer, and the queen ministers to the poor and to the church through him.¹⁰⁴ She also engages in extensive church reform and strives to eliminate simony, infanticide, and

the slave trade. She sends letters to bishops and abbots, advising them to adhere to monastic *regulae*; she endows monasteries and important basilicas with land, sends gifts to the papacy, and reestablishes the veneration of important saints.¹⁰⁵ When she withdraws to her own holy house of Chelles (c. 664/665), she becomes a model nun and humbly serves the abbess Bertilla.¹⁰⁶ Balthild dies on June 30, 680, and God bestows on her tomb the ability to cure those suffering from fevers, toothaches, and demonic possession.¹⁰⁷

The anonymous biographer of Queen Balthild transforms a career of political power into a life of feminized charity, domesticity, and claustration in imitation of previous Merovingian holy queens such as Radegund. Balthild is an Israelite-like captive, a victim of a Germanic *Raubebe*, a charitable queen of an earthly king, and a true bride of the celestial groom. Balthild's life as a bondswoman foreshadows her saintly piety. Her overlord, Erchinoald, honors her as a perfect housekeeper, and she obediently ministers to his table and washes the feet of the elders of his household. She brings bathing water to Erchinoald's family and lays out their clothing. When Erchinoald wishes to make Balthild his bride, "she hid herself secretly in a corner and threw some vile rags over herself" to remain pure to her divine husband, Christ.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps the hagiographer depicts Erchinoald's sexual pursuit of the Anglo-Saxon bondswoman in order to replicate the hagiographical motif of heroic chastity found in the *Life of Radegund*.¹⁰⁹ As Clovis II's queen, Balthild assumes the dutiful roles of mother, nurse, and humble disciple of the male priesthood.¹¹⁰ She feeds and clothes the poor, buries the dead, and dispenses the royal patrimony to ascetics and the church hierarchy, but only under the pious guidance of the priest Genesisius, who serves as her almoner.¹¹¹ And, in imitation of Radegund, Balthild bequeaths her lavish girdle to the monks at Curbio, thereby rejecting the vanities of the royal court.¹¹²

Instead of presenting Balthild as an independent royal regent, the hagiographer focuses on her role as the peacemaker among her sons.¹¹³ She never misuses royal authority, but rather issues commands that enrich the church, reform monasticism, and further diplomatic ties with Rome. She prohibits the sale of Christian captives and protects the cult of the holy dead. According to the *vita*, the queen's retirement to Chelles is a voluntary exile not a political imprisonment.¹¹⁴ In fact, the hagiographer emphasizes that an alliance of Frankish nobles attempted to keep her from entering religious life by plotting to murder the bishop who had encouraged her to do so.¹¹⁵ Balthild herself is never linked with episcopal murder;

instead, the queen enlists the political support of a number of bishops.¹¹⁶ At Chelles, her household duties rival those of the lowliest servant: "She would valiantly take care of the dirtiest cleaning jobs for the sisters in the kitchen, personally cleaning up the dung from the latrine. And she did all this gladly and in perfect joy of spirit, doing such humble service for Christ's sake."¹¹⁷ The hagiographer adds that Balthild had occupied herself with similarly unpleasant domestic tasks even while she was queen. She humbly submits to the authority of the abbess, Bertilla, just as Melania and Radegund placed themselves under the authority of the spiritual overseers of their communities. Engaging in vigils, nursing, and poor relief, Balthild is the model nun.

At Chelles, Balthild suffers from a disease of the bowels, but commends herself to divine medicine rather than temporal cures. Before her death, she envisions a celestial ladder, leading from the altar of her church to heaven; the deaths of the greatest saints were accompanied by such visions.¹¹⁸ The hagiographer concludes Balthild's *vita* by acknowledging the wonder-working abilities of her shrine and by featuring the creation of Balthild's *cultus* at several important churches. Finally, the sacred biographer extols the evangelical perfection of the queen who ended her life as a "true nun."¹¹⁹

The *Life of Balthild of Chelles* is a strange narrative of a saint. Although the hagiographer proclaims that she was an exemplary recluse, the text itself provides no account of the queen's asceticism or *charismata*. In her *vitae*, Radegund crucifies herself, conquers the devil, and resurrects the dead, but Balthild neither enacts any miracles while she is alive nor does she live a spectacularly abstemious life. In fact, once Balthild retires to her community of Chelles, her cloistered existence is entirely constructed around conventions established in previous lives of devout queens. The hagiographer even includes synopses of the lives of other great Merovingian royal saints, such as Chlotild, Ultragotha, and Radegund, to show how Balthild's holy life conforms to these earlier *vitae*. Like Radegund, Balthild is a captive in a foreign household, a bride of Christ, and a domestic martyr. In her sacred biography, Queen Chlotild civilizes her pagan husband by converting him to Christianity; she also promotes the cult of the holy dead in Paris and pioneers a religious institution at Chelles dedicated to Saint George. Similarly, Balthild's charity humanizes Clovis II's reign, which contemporary chronicles report was characterized by degeneracy, violence, and alcoholism.¹²⁰ The image of Balthild as an ecstatic arbitrator of Germanic brutality is an apocalyptic *topos* from Hebrew scrip-

ture (Ezekiel 36–37). The queen is the peacemaker between the Burgundians and the Franks, just as Ezekiel prophesies the miraculous union of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.¹²¹

The image of Balthild as a *mediatrix gratiae* for the bellicose Germanic tribes is also based on the late antique lives of Mediterranean saints, particularly the *Vita Helenae*. Helena's philanthropy and humble domestic piety counter the political and geographic ruptures of the late empire and humanize Constantine's *imperium*. In like fashion, the domestic and charitable lives of Chlotild and Balthild humanize the warrior aristocracy of the Frankish kingdoms. As mediator of their conversion, Chlotild is the vessel of redemption for the Franks: "The queen did not cease to tell the king that he should worship God and desert the vain idols he honored."¹²² Balthild also conforms to Chlotild's sacred portrait in that she revitalizes shrines in Paris and establishes a women's community at Chelles. In imitation of Ultragotha, the wife of King Childeburt, Balthild patronizes male monasticism and nurses the poor. Her charity and ministry to the poor soften the barbarous reign of her husband.

The *vitae* of Chlotild, Ultragotha, and Radegund provided Balthild's hagiographer with an acceptable biographical niche in which to place the controversial rule of the seventh-century queen. In effect, the hagiographer may have been simply extending the political punishment inflicted on Balthild by enemies during her life: immuring her within a convent, keeping her securely within conventional pieties. Not all contemporary sources were so accommodating, however. Stephanus, in his early eighth-century life of the Anglo-Saxon holy man and bishop, Wilfrid of York, compares Balthild to the depraved Jezebel of Hebrew scripture. According to Stephanus, Wilfrid received his clerical tonsure from the bishop of Lyons, Dalfinus, who, along with eight other bishops, was summoned to the Frankish court and executed in the presence of Balthild. Stephanus claims that it was Balthild, a "malicious queen" (*malivola regina*), who gave the order to massacre the holy men: "For at that time there was an evil-hearted queen named Balthild who persecuted the church of God. Even as of old the wicked Queen Jezebel slew the prophets of God, so she, though sparing the priests and deacons, gave command to slay nine bishops, one of whom was this Bishop Dalfinus."¹²³

In fact, Balthild was probably not such an exemplary instrument of the devil. In all likelihood, Balthild had nothing to do with the murder of the nine bishops, and Wilfrid himself was not present at their slaughter.¹²⁴ Wilfrid's hagiographer, Stephanus, was less concerned for the historical ac-

curacy of his account of politics at the Frankish court than for refashioning events within a biblical framework to establish his hero as an Anglo-Saxon Elijah. Within that context, Balthild, the most important woman at the court, fell neatly into place as Elijah's nemesis, the depraved queen Jezebel.¹²⁵ Certainly the construction of gender played a pivotal role in the vilification of Balthild. Jezebel (1 Kings 21) is the personification of human apostasy from God, who induces men to do evil, to reject God, and to eat sacrificial food. No male biblical figure could evoke such an image of human depravity and fleshly sin. Early medieval churchmen, such as Stephanus, inherited an ancient sacred discourse concerning the pernicious influence of powerful women on politics, and they applied this narrative to the lives of powerful contemporary queens.¹²⁶

Balthild's *vita* functions as a kind of *apologia* for a provocative career in politics. It also serves as an advertisement for the religious community at Chelles as well as evidence of the success of the post-mortem *cultus* of the queen.¹²⁷ In the *Life of Balthild of Chelles*, the queen is shown usurping the political and administrative functions of Merovingian kings and Christian bishops. At the same time, the hagiographer tempers Balthild's assertive power by embedding it in a life replete with domestic, charitable, and submissive rhetoric. Balthild's biographer demonstrates the use of hagiographical rhetoric for conservative purposes; the royal woman who overstepped her authority as regent is posthumously accommodated within the hagiographical model of the biblical serving woman. The intent of the anonymous hagiographer is clear at the conclusion of the *vita*, which celebrates the conventional attributes: "To her followers, she left a holy example of humility and patience, mildness and overflowing zest for loving; nay more, infinite mercy, astute and prudent vigilance, pure confessions."¹²⁸

The corpus of Merovingian women's lives exemplifies the paradoxical treatment of female saints by sacred biographers. In numerous ways, Merovingian female saints expropriate the functions of the consecrated male priesthood. Monegund dispenses grace throughout the warring Frankish kingdoms as if she were a eucharist celebrant. Radegund mystically baptizes the sick, anoints the dying, and occupies Christ's chair at Frankish re-creations of the last supper. She is a Merovingian Helena, who transforms Gaul into a Christian province and dispenses the "medicine of salvation" among the Franks. Balthild is a female bishop who takes an active role in appointing church officials, promoting the ecclesiastical economy, and reforming clerical morality. The hagiographers of these three women,

however, soften such imposing images of female authority by employing conventional domestic rhetoric.

Vitae of holy women concentrate on the pious service of the Martha figure and the desert motif of an immured woman as a receptacle of grace. Gregory of Tours recasts the independent Monegund into a miraculous nurse and pious attendant of the post-mortem cults of the bishop-saints of Gaul. By secluding herself in a desert-like cell, Monegund becomes a repository of divine power. Radegund is a domestic martyr who brands her flesh and wears heavy chains; but she also dusts altars, cleans latrines, and tends the cloister's hearth. Radegund's ability to resurrect the dead, exorcize demons, and dispel disease stems from her self-imprisonment in an ascetic crypt and from her uncompromising adherence to the Rule of Caesarius.¹²⁹ The constructed, hagiographical image of Balthild uses the domestic-martyr *topos* created in Fortunatus's *Life of Radegund* to tame the seventh-century queen's controversial rule in Gaul. Balthild's anonymous biographer places her *vita* within the context of the hallowed lives of the great Merovingian philanthropists, Chlotild, Ultragotha, and Radegund. While the historical Balthild was an important monastic and clerical reformer, the hagiographical Balthild is a holy housekeeper, ministering to Frankish noblemen and cloistered nuns. Frankish churchmen chose to juxtapose the conflicting images of the holy woman as Christ crucified and domestic minister to prophetic men. These early medieval hagiographers created enigmatic portraits of their subjects to instruct lay, monastic, and clerical audiences that, although female saints can literally become Christ, they nonetheless continue to serve as the submissive attendants of male priests. Only consecrated men, who officiate at God's sacrificial table, provide the unique and ecstatic link between human communities and the divine. The *vitae* of female saints, however, also fulfill a distinctive role, for the conversion of Merovingian noblewomen to the life of cloistered virtue offers the salvific power of the cross to all Germanic and Celtic peoples.

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Conclusion: Sacred Fictions

BUILDING ON MODELS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE, the Christian gospels established gender-based images of piety and faith that remained influential well into the modern period. In late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, those images were most powerfully and widely transmitted through the popular medium of hagiography. In part the product of their environment, the *vitae* of saints are thus a cornucopia of information for the historian about society, culture, and values in different times and places. To concentrate mainly on the historical “facts” of these texts, however, is to ignore their role as sacred fictions, as documents providing spiritual direction for ancient and diverse audiences. Hagiography is a very treacherous source, wherein the historian is tempted to treat the *vitae* as transparent windows on the past rather than as fictional narratives driven by biblical *topoi*, literary invention, and moral imperative. Perhaps predictably, crucial theological and salvific messages of hagiographical texts often have been neglected by historians intent on extracting social or political realities. In particular, feminist historians have analyzed the sacred biographies of holy women to reveal the hidden history of female empowerment in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. It is no denigration of feminist values to suggest that this is to enlist hagiographical texts in a modern political agenda that can only do violence to their subtle, convoluted nature. On the contrary, an understanding of *vitae* within their historical context can do much to illuminate perceptions of male and female capacities that have shaped the fate of both sexes throughout western history.

The sacred fictions of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages cannot be read at face value for the history of women in the church any more than the Christian gospels can be taken as factual depictions of Jesus’ mission and destiny. The gospel of Luke (8.1–2) makes a distinction between Jesus’ male and female disciples that would be exemplary for the future: “And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Suzanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.” The

passage nicely captures the tension between the male votaries, “the twelve” who constitute Jesus’ most intimate circle, and his female supporters who formerly were demon-possessed and diseased. The Savior’s most important intimates are not the women who watch the events of the crucifixion “from afar” (Matthew 27.55) but apostolic men who lie “close to the breast of Jesus” (John 13.25).¹ The contrast not only encapsulates a difference of function among the followers of Jesus—charismatic males who will extend the mission of salvation and female patrons who will support them—it also assumes certain failings that were regarded as intrinsic to men and women.

Men, including some of Jesus’ cherished companions, are liable to be alienated from faith because they venerate the human intellect. In the gospels, Jesus uses the metaphor of blindness to condemn masculine skepticism: “You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean” (Matthew 23.26). Vision and darkness symbolize Jesus’ ministry to men: “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” (John 9.39). The resurrected Christ converts the future apostle Paul by clouding his mortal eyes: “Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing” (Acts 9.8). Men are the doubters of Jesus’ divinity, both during his earthly ministry and after his bodily resurrection. Spiritually blinded by overweening reason, men are hard-won converts to the grace of God. Demanding proof of the resurrection, the apostle Thomas touches the flesh of Christ: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe” (John 20.25).

Lacking the male commitment to reason and evidence, women do not demand physical proofs or miraculous signs. They unquestioningly recognize the Messiah, as with the Samaritan woman submitting to Jesus with the simple declaration, “I perceive that you are a prophet” (John 4.19). The failings of women lie in the flesh, not in their display of immoderate reason. Time and again, Jesus violates Hebrew taboos in response to the faith of women: “And [Jesus] came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you arise.’ And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And [Jesus] gave him to his mother” (Luke 7.14–15). By touching funeral biers and cleansing menstruating women, Jesus ignores purity laws in the name of the new dispensation. He tends to the unique ailments of women, restoring a girl at the onset of menstruation (Mark 5.42) and curing a post-menopausal woman (Luke 13.11–13). When a hemorrhaging woman touches Jesus’ robe, “he said to her, ‘Daughter,

your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease'” (Mark 5.34).

The presentation of Jesus' ministry in the gospels relies on ancient gender constructions that identify human intellect as masculine and human flesh as feminine. The skepticism of men poses a barrier to simple faith, while the “fleshy wrappings” of women impede the soul's journey back to God.² But if the faults of women lie in their bodies, their strength stems from their unquestioning faith. Inferior to men by virtue of their weak intellect and polluted flesh, women embody wellsprings of simplicity and devotion from which even men might draw. The gender-based temptations of the intellect and of the flesh thus account for the twofold symbolic mission of Jesus: to restore spiritually blind men to God's grace and to release the simple faith of the female as an example to all humankind. The biblical rhetoric of inversion depicts a human-God who ventures beyond patriarchal heads of households to embrace faithful women, who thereby become symbolic icons of the new order despite their pollution and intrinsic faults. The salvific message of the gospels depends on Jesus' restoration of diseased and demon-possessed women, for the conversion of these polluted females to pristine faith in God foreshadows the possibility of universal redemption. The fall from paradise that began with the failings of Eve will be reversed by the simple, submissive faith of her daughters.

Biblical discourse is the key to understanding the symbolic meanings of female *vitae*; scriptural notions of the male and female flowed directly into and pervasively shaped the writing of Christian hagiography. Late antique and early medieval sacred biographers simultaneously present the sanctification of women through the *imitatio Christi* and the obedience of these potent women to the greater authority of sacred males. The critical salvific directive of women's *vitae* is the transformation of female flesh from sin to redemption in imitation of the metamorphosis of fallen Eve to the blessed Mary. Because women were first alienated from God (Genesis 3), they personify human attachment to carnal indulgence and the estrangement of flesh from the spirit. But like unfaithful Israel, who “upon every high hill and under every green tree bowed down as a harlot” (Jeremiah 2.20), fallen women can be reconciled to God through the agency of charismatic males. The sacred biographies of desert hermits, patrician philanthropists, and Merovingian nuns all replicate the spiritual metamorphosis of the biblical daughters of Zion, who “walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go” until the

Lord converts them into icons of repentance, mourning human apostasy and sitting "ravaged upon the ground" (Isaiah 3.16–26). Christian hagiographers adopt Isaiah's rhetoric in presenting humble and contrite female penitents as mediators of grace for men and women. As a metaphorical reunion of flesh and spirit, the conversion of the female represents the possibility of redemption for all sinners, whatever their sex.

Hagiographical texts emphasize the hope for universal salvation through the conversion of whores, wealthy matrons, and pampered queens. The Syrian and Egyptian ammai who conceal their withered flesh under enormous mantles and creep about in cramped cells function as enshrined penitents, atoning for the fall of Eve by serving as archetypes of piety. The conversions of the harlots, Pelagia and Mary, to lives of radical self-abnegation refashion their debauched bodies into vessels of redemption. The sacred biographies of Roman patricians teach that even opulent matrons can humble themselves to hierarchical male authority and can pass "through the eye of a needle." The written lives of Helena, Paula, and Melania serve as spiritual medicine for aristocratic women clinging to the feminine vices of self-indulgence and ostentation. The charismatic lives of Frankish holy women show that institutional claustration, always under male authority, can transform the female body into a celestial benediction for barbarous nations.

Almost always written by men, the sacred lives of female penitents contain specific spiritual messages for the male ecclesiastical hierarchy. Mary of Egypt's mythological *vita* uses the leitmotif of inversion both to castigate masculine pride and to empower male altar servants. Mary is less the central figure of her own sacred fiction than a mere instrument through which a male priest, Zosimas, comes to recognize that naive faith is superior to the righteousness of works. Even though she is the means of humbling the prideful Zosimas, Mary submissively relies on the male priest to bring her the Lord's body and blood in a sacred vessel. The achievements of the Augusta Helena in her legendary biography are less important in themselves than in their contribution to her son Constantine in his creation of a holy polity. Helena is an allegorical Madonna of a Christian empire, whose nurturing and devotional actions soften the militant, apocalyptic *Vita Constantini*; her private, domestic concerns complement the public actions of the victorious emperor. The ambivalent portrait of Melania the Younger in Gerontius's text mutes the powerful holy woman's economic influence within the fifth-century church by introducing the biblical motif of feminine self-indulgence as an impediment to salvation. Because Melania re-

tained substantial wealth until her death, she remained a scandal to the male hierarchy as well as a living proof of the depths of female frailty. It is clear from Gerontius that Melania could only exorcize the final demons of self-indulgence through the superior agency of sacred males. In their *vitae* of Frankish queens, hagiographers critique the usurpation by women of the powers of the consecrated male hierarchy by highlighting the evangelical image of dutiful women ministering to apostolic men. Just as Mary of Egypt took second place to Zosimas in her *vita*, Monegund's spiritual career, as it appears in Gregory of Tours's account, was an appendage to that of the *cultus* of Saint Martin. In like fashion, Queen Radegund's charismatic asceticism, as related in Fortunatus's *vita*, was qualified, and thereby controlled, by being placed within a context of domestic duty and cloistered virtue. In feminizing the spirituality of their sacred subjects, male hagiographers simultaneously circumscribed the charismatic power of holy women and elevated the hierarchical authority of male ecclesiastics.

Although the lives of female saints directed a special message to male altar servants, a more universal one was intended for general Christian audiences. Congregations absorbed the lessons of hallowed *vitae* through a variety of means, including written texts (whether read singly or with others), liturgical performances on feast days and holy days, and artistic productions (in paint, sculpture, and chant). However they were communicated, narratives of sacred women taught that both sexes can imitate Christ in their everyday lives—always in ways that conform to conventional gender precepts. Of course, the lives of contrite harlots, impoverished patricians, and ascetic queens all take the *vita Christi* to fantastic extremes—a naked Mary roaming the harsh Jordanian desert, a lice-infested Melania the Younger immured in a claustrophobic cell, Radegund branding herself with a red-hot crucifix. The hagiographers who constructed these images of extravagant asceticism certainly did not expect average Christians to replicate the self-inflicted torments of these saints. Rather, the very immoderation of suffering extolled in the *vitae* was intended to induce Christians to embrace the necessity for daily sacrifice, no matter how mundane and meager, such as giving alms to the church, submitting to penitential correction, enduring fasts, restraining from sexual intercourse, and forswearing ornaments and cosmetics.

The purpose of the hagiographers was not simply to denigrate or confine female capacities *per se* but to illuminate them for an audience focused on private, domestic concerns. In this regard, a crucial lesson of the lives of Pelagia and Mary of Egypt was that if the lowliest of society, common

harlots and profligates, could redeem themselves, then so too could those less ravaged by demands of the flesh. The lives of Helena, Paula, and Melania conveyed the moral to all ranks of society that wealth and position were less important than self-abnegation and piety. The lives of Rade Gund and Balthild taught that if queens could so completely suppress temptations of the flesh, if they could so successfully subordinate themselves to hierarchical authority, then far less exalted persons could do so as well. These general lessons were entirely consonant with the concern of hagiographers to mute or domesticate the achievements of outstanding women. Narratives of charismatic females submitting to the direction of male ecclesiastics served to reinforce the injunctions that all Christians should obey the priestly caste and that all wives should comply with their husbands' commands.

Like the apostles who were "close to the breast of Jesus," the lives of holy men generally presented distant ideals, dramatizations of the militant soteriology of the crucifixion, and the unique power of God's altar servants. In contrast, the *vitae* of holy women emphasize the restorative powers of the cross, the virtue of simple piety, and women's domestic ministry to superior men. Like the repentant females who ministered to Jesus and followed him to Golgotha to witness the crucifixion "from afar," holy women dutifully and submissively served charismatic men precisely because their spirituality was distinct from and subordinate to that of sacred males. That spirituality probably had a special relevance at a time when the ecclesiastical hierarchy was increasingly separate and distinct from the general society. As the altar space became the special reserve of relatively few consecrated males, most men and all women were excluded from the most sanctified area of the church. Lessons that could be drawn from female *vitae* had increasingly greater relevance to ordinary Christians than did narratives focused on the hallowed male priesthood. Sacred fictions of the female saint brought piety down to earth.

Subtle, complex, and replete with narrative incident, hagiographical texts had enormous potential for expansion and elaboration. Diverse meanings were garnered from (or imposed on) the *vitae* as they spread throughout the Mediterranean and reached into different social groups, especially as texts were scrutinized and interpreted to address concerns that were distant from those of the original hagiographers. In this regard, it seems that the more extreme and inventive were the sufferings of the saint, the more the sacred life was open to allegorical reconstruction. The *Life of Mary of Egypt*, then, experienced striking transformations, even though the central

narrative of the text remained unchanged. It was probably intended by the original author as a castigation of prideful male ascetics who, in their mortal attempts to live as Christ crucified, ignored the Lord's teachings on humility. That message, however, had only slight resonance for Frankish audiences unacquainted with the excesses of anchoritic asceticism; hence, in Carolingian Gaul, where paganism still flourished, the *vita* of Mary was read as an elaborate allegory of the conversion process. In eighth-century Byzantium, the iconodule John of Damascus used the *vita* of the Egyptian Mary to demonstrate how an icon of the *Theotokos* converted the whore to the life of repentance.³ In the fourteenth century, an Italian merchant, John Colombini, converted to the life of radical privation after he read Mary's provocative *vita*.⁴ For audiences in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the story of Mary's transformation from a debauched harlot into a redemptive vessel symbolized the future renewal of an apostate church divided by violent schism. In the nineteenth century, the French painter Dominique Papety chose to depict the first meeting between a shy Zosimas and a very seductive Mary of Egypt (Figure 5). John Tavener's opera, *Mary of Egypt: An Icon in Music and Dance* (1992), reworked the desert legend as a parable about the chimerical nature of virtue and the different paths toward salvation.

Few sacred biographies have had so extraordinary a career as Mary of Egypt's, but many were reinterpreted in novel ways. The life of Melania the Younger, originally a critique of feminine self-indulgence, was recast in later centuries as an allegory of the bounty that flows from God's grace, whereas political elements in the story of Radegund, which were central to its composition, were ignored to highlight the saint as the embodiment of monastic virtue. Audiences hundreds of years removed from the society of Roman aristocrats could appreciate the narrative of the life of Paula as an allegory about the triumph of obedience and humility over earthly obsessions. The *vita* of the Augusta Helena was the product of writers devoted to allegorical discourse, so Helena was consciously presented from the first as a mediator of grace for the Christian empire. This made it easy for later medieval and Renaissance writers to adapt the model developed for Helena to the lives of other royal matriarchs, such as the Byzantine Empress Irene (mother of Constantine VI), Blanche of Castile (mother of Louis IX of France), and Margaret Beaufort (mother of Henry VII of England).

By the seventh century, hagiographers had at their disposal a formidable array of *topoi* of female piety refined over centuries. They had become adept at applying conventions that first appeared in the *vitae* of ascetics of



Figure 5. Dominique Papety, “Abba Zosimas delivers his cloak to Saint Mary the Egyptian (1837–42).” Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France. Musée Fabre—Montpellier, Cliché Frédéric Jaulmes.

the East to the very different scene in Merovingian Gaul. This hagiographical inheritance played a large role in the history of women in the West over the next thirteen hundred years. Biblical rhetoric, as institutionalized in the *vitae* of repentant females, continued to foster both negative and positive images of women in sacred and even secular portraits. Women who deviated from what men considered appropriate behavior for females were represented with the negative attributes of Eve: frail flesh, weak judgment, depravity, levity, and self-indulgence. In contrast, virtuous women in Roman Catholic and later Protestant narratives were seen as like the Virgin Mary, with lives exemplifying the ideal feminine qualities of piety, submission, motherhood, innocence, and compunction. Domesticity, philanthropy, and claustration, the crucial attributes of early medieval female saints’ lives, continued to be the focal points of feminine piety for cloistered nuns and a diverse group of lay women. Domestic metaphors per-

meated the symbolic language of late medieval female mystics, who signified their rejection of the world through humble table service under the disciplined guidance of sacred males. Clausturation, which constituted a central feature of medieval spirituality for women, emerged as a secular ideal in late medieval and Reformation Europe. Fifteenth-century preachers, such as San Bernadino of Siena, celebrated the *madonna clausura* ("cloistered lady") as the ideal wife because she rarely ventured out of her home and (allegorically speaking) knew only the company of angels. San Bernadino enjoined married women to avoid using wigs, opulent clothing, and featherbeds, and he even went so far as to urge them to avoid public appearances, including sermons in church.⁵

Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century did away with the institutional cloister as women's special domain, but they resituated women within the confines of a cloistered, secular household ruled by a patriarch. The home increasingly was elevated as a peculiarly female realm, where the wife served as the spiritual helpmate of the man and as the moral guardian of the child. The separate sphere of female spirituality, so thoroughly delineated in late antique hagiography, thrived in the secular atmosphere of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ While the supposedly spiritual nature of women meant that they were not suited for public authority, philanthropy remained an appropriate activity. Women could venture into public life, especially in voluntary reform organizations, to the extent that they supported worthy endeavors that were defined by men and that preserved the sanctity of home and the family.⁷ Women who went beyond those limits risked criticism and scandal that was not radically different from that visited on Melania the Younger and Queen Radegund. Moreover, following hagiographical precedent, the physical appearance of women continued to be seen as an outward sign of their interior piety or depravity. The theology of the cosmetic resurfaced in the image of the nineteenth-century "painted woman" whose loose hair denoted a licentious female, while in the 1920s short hair on women was widely regarded as an assertion of hedonism and gender transgression.⁸ Long after the hagiographical roots of such notions were forgotten, they continued to condition perceptions of the nature and capacities of the female.

Drawing on the Hebrew Bible and Christian gospels, hagiographers narrated stories that assumed common notions about women and men, faith and reason, reverence and authority, the sacred and the profane. Although little that they asserted on these topics was novel, the popularity and longevity of hagiographical texts meant that their biographies of holy

women and men played a substantial role in preserving, elaborating, and passing on a venerable tradition of accommodating female spirituality within hierarchical structures. It is clear that the audience for these texts was never composed only of Syrian abbots, Roman matrons, Byzantine courtiers, and Frankish lords. Rather, they were aimed at disparate audiences of ordinary persons seeking guidance and consolation in an exceptionally tumultuous time. The *vitae* of holy women were an important vehicle for teaching moral lessons relevant to the needs and aspirations of common Christians in their homes, families, and marriages. In sustaining an ancient tradition of saintly biography, from the female ascetics of the eastern desert to the penitent queens of western courts, late antique and early medieval hagiographers responded to deep-seated spiritual anxieties and hopes. Their sacred fictions held out the promise of universal redemption. As Zosimas pleaded with Mary of Egypt when shame made her stop telling her story, "For God's sake, speak, Mother; go on and do not break the thread of your life-giving narrative."⁹

Notes

Abbreviations

AS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> . Bruxelles: Impression Anastaltique Culture et Civilisation, 1970.
CC	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i> . Turnholt: Brepolis Editores Pontificii, 1956.
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> . New York and London: Johnson Reprint, 1963.
MANSI	Mansi, Joannes Dominicus, ed. <i>Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio</i> . 31 vols. Graz: Akademische Druck—u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960.
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> . Societas Aperiendis Fontibus Rerum Germanicarum.
EPP	<i>Epistolae</i> .
SCR	<i>Scriptorum</i> .
SRM	<i>Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i> .
PG	J. P. Migne, ed. <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> . Paris, 1886.
PL	J. P. Migne, ed. <i>Patrologia Latina</i> . Paris, 1886.
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> . Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1943–.

Introduction

1. “Mulier autem erat, quod videbatur, corpore nigerrimo, prae solis ardore denigrata, et capillos capitis habens ut lana albos, modicos et ipsos, non amplius quam usque ad cervicem descendentes”: *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 7 (PL 73.677); translation from Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 41.

2. The Vulgate reads: “caput autem eius, et capilli erant candidi tanquam lana alba, et tanquam nix.” Biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version.

3. Author’s translation of Vulgate: “Nigra sum sed formosa . . . nolite me considerare quod fusca sim, quia decoloravit me sol.”

4. “Late antiquity” includes both the chronological period of c. 300–800 CE and the geographic region of the Mediterranean and the Near East. The early Middle Ages (c. 500–1000) overlaps the period of late antiquity but comprises the geographic region of the barbarian kingdoms of northern Europe. For an overview of the era of late antiquity, see Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395–600* (London: Routledge, 1993).

5. The sections on the rhetorical uses of clothing are indebted to Marcia Colish’s article, “Cosmetic Theology: The Transformation of a Stoic Theme,” *Assays* 1 (1984): 3–14; and R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 39–47.

6. The lives of both Mary and Pelagia appear in the compilation of later medieval saints’ lives, Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, ed. and trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), and have been translated into numerous languages, including Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and various Slavic languages. See Pierre Petit-mengin et al., eds., *Pélagie la pénitente: métamorphoses d’une légende*, 2 vols. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1981, 1984); and Peter F. Dembowski, *La Vie de Sainte Marie l’Égyptienne* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1977).

7. See Kenneth Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 25–26.

8. Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a “True” Image* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 34.

9. Gallo-Roman and Frankish historians and hagiographers acknowledge the importance of the *vitae* of Helena, Melania the Elder, Melania the Younger, and Paula: Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 1.40 (MGH SRM 1.1.27); Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum*, 5 (MGH SRM 1.2.39–42); Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 16 (MGH SRM 2.387–89); and the anonymous *Vita Saldabergae abbatissae Laudunensis*, 25 (MGH SRM 5.64).

10. Patrick Geary, “Saints, Scholars, and Society,” chap. 1 in *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 11.

11. Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend*, Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae Kyrkovetenskapliga studier 47 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1991), details the textual tradition of the Helena legend.

12. Julia M. H. Smith, “The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c. 780–920,” *Past and Present* 146 (1995): 12.

13. For discussions of sinful women as salvific instruments, see Susan Harvey, “Women in Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story,” in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, ed. Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 36–59; and Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*.

14. The twelfth-century mystic Hildegard of Bingen also viewed the Creator as a mother who gives birth to the “ministry of the Word.” See Augustine Thompson, “Hildegard of Bingen on Gender and the Priesthood,” *Church History* 63 (1994): 349–64.

15. Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Female Body and Religious Practice in the

Later Middle Ages,” in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 215.

16. For the asymmetrical pairings of masculine/feminine, see Bynum’s essays in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, and her earlier work, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), as well as, “. . . And His Humanity”: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages,” in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 257. Bynum cites the work of art historians on the Virgin Mary as symbolic altarpiece; see Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 71–72; and Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 13–15, 27–29.

17. Averil Cameron, “Virginity as Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity,” in *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History*, ed. Averil Cameron (London: Duckworth, 1988), 184–205.

18. Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 265.

19. For a historiographical discussion of the radical feminist hermeneutics, see Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Toward a Feminist Critical Hermeneutics,” chap. 1 in *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). Schüssler-Fiorenza here discusses the work of the “post-biblical” feminist, Mary Daly.

20. Janet Soskice (“Blood and Defilement,” paper presented at the Society for the Study of Theology Conference, Oxford University, April 11–14, 1994) discusses how contemporary feminist theologians have highlighted Christ’s “gender egalitarianism” and have ignored issues of ritual pollution and defilement.

21. For a discussion of feminist methodologies, see Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Toward a Feminist Critical Hermeneutics,” and her *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

22. Joyce Salisbury, in *Church Fathers and Independent Virgins* (London: Verso, 1991), examines the *vitae* of Constantia, Mary of Egypt, Helia, Egeria, Melania the Younger, Pelagia, and Castissima.

23. For a discussion of recent feminist theological critical methodologies, see Mary Ann Tolbert, “Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, ed. Schüssler-Fiorenza, 255–71, 258–59. Roberta Gilchrist provides an introduction to post-structuralism and medieval archaeology in chap. 1 of her *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Female Monastic Houses* (London: Routledge, 1994). See also Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, 350–450* (London: Routledge, 1995); Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and*

Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Michel Feher, ed., *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, 3 vols. (New York: Zone Books, 1989); Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage, 1989); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Cameron, ed., *History as Text*, 184–205; and Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, trans. Felicia Pheasant (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988). Several of these scholars cite Michel Foucault (*The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols. [New York: Pantheon, 1978]) as a major influence.

24. Averil Cameron (*Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of a Christian Discourse* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991]) discusses the many “rhetorical strategies” found in sacred discourse.

25. Kate Cooper, “Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992): 151.

26. Cooper, “Insinuations of Womanly Influence,” 151.

27. Julia Smith (“The Problem of Female Sanctity,” 20) discusses the depiction of Merovingian and Carolingian women saints “in terms of an essentially male notion of sanctity.” See also Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 13: “It is through these male commentators that we must look at women.”

28. All four gospels contain the story of the anointing woman. There are, however, differences among the four accounts. In Matthew and Mark, the anointing occurs in the house of “Simon the leper.” In Luke, the symbolic action takes place in the house of a Pharisee; and in John, it transpires in the dwelling of Mary and Martha of Bethany. In Luke and John, the woman wipes Jesus’ feet with her hair.

Chapter I

1. Cameron (*Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 5) defines discourse as “all the rhetorical strategies and manners of expression” contained within numerous Christian writings. The classic works on hagiography include Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. Donald Attwater (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), and René Aigrain, *L’Hagiographie: ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1953). The secondary source work on hagiographical literature is extensive. The Bollandist successors to the early work of Delehaye include Baudouin de Gaiffier, *Recueil d’hagiographie*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 61 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1977); Baudouin de Gaffier, *Recherches d’hagiographie Latine*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 52 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1971); and Pierre Delehaye, *Les Légendes hagiographiques* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1955), among numerous others. More recent works include Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Peter Brown, *Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

For the cross-cultural perspective, see Stephen Wilson, *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

2. For example, Gregory of Tours describes how two blind men were healed during the public reading of a saint's *vita* during mass: "Factum est autem in die festivitatis suae, adstante populo, dum virtutes de vita illius legerentur, factus est super illos splendor corrusco similis, et concontractis ligaturis, quae palpebras obseraverant, defluente ex oculis sanguine, late visu patente, cuncta cernere meruerunt." Gregory of Tours, *De Virtutibus S. Martini*, 2.29 (MGH SRM 1.2.170). E. Catherine Dunn (*The Gallican Saint's Life and the Late Roman Dramatic Tradition* [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1989]) suggests that such public recitations were actually theatrical performances.

3. Confessors are those exemplary Christians who crucify their own flesh to imitate the passions of the martyrs and the death of Christ. Discussed by Raymond Van Dam, *Glory of the Confessors* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), 10–11.

4. "Alumnos cultoresque amicorum suorum protegere dignetur in saeculo": Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum*, 106 (MGH SRM 1.2.111).

5. Peter Brown uses the phrase *amici Dei* ("friends of God") throughout *Cult of the Saints*.

6. Delehay (*Legends of the Saints*, 230) states that the lives of the saints act out the "sublime ideal" of the gospels.

7. For the world-religions perspective, see Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond, eds., *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). This collection investigates notions of sanctity in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

8. For a discussion of classical hagiography, see Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); and Robert L. Cohn, "Sainthood on the Periphery: The Case of Judaism," in *Sainthood*, ed. Kieckhefer and Bond, 43–68.

9. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 9.

10. Edith Wyschogrod (*Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], 13) argues that the life of Christ is an "unrealizable imperative" because its miraculous quality cannot be duplicated by mere mortals.

11. Kieckhefer, "Imitators of Christ: Sainthood in the Christian Tradition," in *Sainthood*, ed. Kieckhefer and Bond, 12.

12. Brown, in *Cult of the Saints* (69–85), refers to the "very special dead" of God.

13. Kieckhefer, "Imitators of Christ," 4.

14. For the process of canonization, see E. W. Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948); André Vauchez, *La Sainteté en occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge, d'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome: École Française de Rome,

1981); Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 64–68; and Kieckhefer, “Imitators of Christ,” 5–11.

15. Woodward (*Making Saints*, 15, 68) discusses both the papal procedures and the role of the *vox populi*. See also Kieckhefer, “Imitators of Christ,” 6.

16. For an analysis of Hume, Gibbon, and hagiography, see Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 13–22. See also Patrick Geary, “Saints, Scholars, and Society,” in *Living with the Dead*, 9–10.

17. As early as the 1930s, Henri Pirenne’s *Mahomet et Charlemagne* recognized the value of Merovingian hagiography as evidence for the continued existence of trade networks in northern Europe during the early Middle Ages. Pirenne’s use of hagiographical texts is discussed in Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne, and the Origins of Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 5–6. In the 1960s, Frantisek Graus (*Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* [Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1965]) explored the social ramifications of hagiography as well as its propagandistic qualities. Patrick Geary (“Saints, Scholars, and Society,” 12–13) discusses Graus’s contribution to the field of hagiology. Other historians who have quarried *vitae* for glimpses of social and economic realities include Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, (*Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982]).

18. Peter Brown’s *Cult of the Saints* (1981) explores the political, theological, and cultural uses of hagiographical narratives. Marc Van Uytenghe (“Modèles bibliques dans l’hagiographie,” in *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*, ed. Pierre Riché and Guy Lobrichon [Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1984], 450) discusses saints’ lives as “instruments d’évangélisation.” Both Van Uytenghe, “Modèles bibliques dans l’hagiographie,” and Jean LeClercq, “L’Écriture sainte dans l’hagiographie monastique du Haut Moyen Âge,” *La Biblia nell’alto medioevo, settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo* (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro, 1963), 103–28, examine the influence of the Bible on hagiographical literature. Caroline Walker Bynum has investigated the gendered implications of sacred biographies (*Holy Feast and Holy Fast* [1987] and *Fragmentation and Redemption* [1991]), and, more recently, Gillian Cloke (*This Female Man of God*) explores the social implications of late imperial women’s hagiography. See also Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God*; Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*; Aline Rouselle, *Porneia*; Peter Brown, *Body and Society*; Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1985); Franca Ela Conso-lino, “Modelli di santità femminile nelle più antiche Passioni romane,” *Augustinianum* 24 (1984): 83–113; and Averil Cameron and Kuhrt Cameron, eds., *Images of Women in Late Antiquity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983).

19. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 202–3.

20. Marc Van Uytenghe, “L’Hagiographie et son public à l’époque mérovingienne,” *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985): 54–62.

21. See Van Uytenghe, “L’Hagiographie et son public,” 55.

22. Katrien Heene (“Audire, legere, vulgo: An Attempt to Define Public

Use and Comprehensibility of Carolingian Hagiography,” in *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Wright [New York: Routledge, 1991], 146–63) uses the phrases “pastoral communication” and “pastoral objectives.” She also discusses the vocabulary of Merovingian and Carolingian *vitae*. See also Heene’s article, “Merovingian and Carolingian Hagiography: Continuity or Change in Public and Aims?” *Analecta Bollandiana* 107 (1989): 415–28. The work of Marc Van Uytanghe: “Modèles bibliques dans l’hagiographie”; “L’Hagiographie et son public”; “Histoire du latin, protohistoire des langues romanes et histoire de la communication,” *Francia* 11 (1984): 579–613, has done much to illuminate the issue of audience. Furthermore, consult Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 18–22; and Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 1. For audience response to the visual arts, see Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

23. Julia Smith (“Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe,” 13–14) notes that the *vita* of Radegund of Poitiers by Venantius Fortunatus circulated widely beyond Poitiers.

24. For the theory of oral composition, see the work of John Miles Foley: *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and “Orality, Textuality, and Interpretation,” in *Vox intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. A. N. Doane and Carol Braun Pasternack (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 34–45.

25. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 22.

26. Foley, *Immanent Art*, 7.

27. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 45.

28. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 97.

29. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 2.377–95. In the prologue to the *vita* Baudonivia names herself: “Baudonivia humilis omnium.” There are other female-authored saints’s lives, including that of the Merovingian Queen Balthild composed by an anonymous nun at Chelles; see MGH SRM 2.482–508. For discussions of female-authored *vitae*, see Rosamond McKitterick, “Frauen und Schriftlichkeit im Frühmittelalter,” in *Weibliche Lebensgestaltung im Frühen Mittelalter*, ed. H. W. Goetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), 65–118; and Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500–900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 181–88. For the female readership of medieval women’s saints’ lives, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “Saints’ Lives and the Female Reader,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27 (1991): 314–32.

30. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vita Antonii*, PG 26.835–976. Athanasius wrote the *vita* shortly after the death of the holy Antony in 356. For a discussion of Athanasius’s career and writings, see David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

31. Most notably Jerome (c. 342–420), who wrote several biographies of

famous patrician women and men. For a discussion of the patristics and the discourse of virginity, see Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, chap. 4.

32. For a discussion of patristic uses of hagiographical discourse, see Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, chap. 4; and Elm, *Virgins of God*, 39ff, 151ff.

33. See Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, PL 23.17–60; and Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, SC 133–35. Martin Heinzelmann (“Neue Aspekte der biographischen und hagiographischen Literatur in der lateinischen Welt [1.–6. Jahrhundert],” *Franzia* 1 [1973], 27–44) discusses the relationship between early hagiography and pagan eulogy.

34. Hieronimus presbiter et post apostolum Paulum bonus doctor ecclesiae refert”: Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum*, Prologue (MGH SRM 1.2.37).

35. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 141.

36. Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 226.

37. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 209–10.

38. Discussed by Robin Lane Fox in “Literacy and Power in Early Christianity,” in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 145–46. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, examines nonverbal responses to the visual arts.

39. Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 241ff.

40. Gregory of Tours claims that his own mother cured a girl by tying a relic of a saint around her neck (*Gloria Confessorum*, 84).

41. Discussed by John M. McCulloh in “The Cult of Relics in the Letters and ‘Dialogues’ of Pope Gregory the Great: A Lexicographical Study,” *Traditio* 32 (1976): 145–84.

42. For a discussion of the ability of religious images to evoke physical responses, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), esp. 99–135.

43. Dunn, *Gallican Saint's Life*, 84–85, details the liturgical recitation of saints' lives in Gaul.

44. Discussed by Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 57.

45. In his 1992 opera, *Mary of Egypt: An Icon in Music and Dance*, the contemporary British composer John Tavener describes the hagiographical life of the harlot-saint as a “moving icon” of the faith.

46. For an analysis of the eastern holy man as a “living icon,” see Peter Brown, “Eastern and Western Christianity in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways,” in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 166–95; and Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 157–211.

47. Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 8.15 (MGH SRM 1.1.380–383). Gregory frames his *Histories* in the motifs and metaphors of sacred discourse, and, therefore, it is a hagiographical history.

48. Simeon's life is in Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa* = *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, 26 (ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghem, SC 234, 257).

English translation in R. M. Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Cistercian Studies Series 88 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 160–76.

49. Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 138.

50. One of the most influential eucharistic tales from the Middle Ages is the so-called *Mass of Saint Gregory*. For a discussion of the theological and political uses of the *Mass of Saint Gregory*, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 308–10, and Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 316.

51. In his *Dialogorum libri IV* (SC 251, 260, 265) Gregory the Great tells the story of a nun who became possessed after neglecting to bless her salad before she ate it, thereby missing the minute devil perched on the lettuce (*Dialogorum libri IV*, 1.7). Gregory also reinforces the importance of keeping the sabbath and holy days by relating the tale of a married woman who was possessed by a demon because she had sexual relations with her husband prior to the dedication of a church (*Dialogorum libri IV*, 1.10).

52. Gregory the Great's life of Saint Benedict includes an example of the saint's power to release souls from purgatory (*Dialogorum libri IV*, 2.23).

53. For a discussion of how saints' lives dictate proper reverence for the saints, see Brown, "Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours," in *Society and the Holy*, 222–50.

54. See Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 43ff.

55. Brown, "The Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *Society and the Holy*, 131–32.

56. See Tacitus, *Annales* 13.5; cited by Holum, *Theodosian Emperresses*, 29–30; Holum also notes that Roman law prohibited women from wearing senatorial garb and insignia.

57. For a discussion of the evangelical image of Mary Magdalene, see Susan Haskins, "De Unica Magdalena," chap. 1 in *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* (New York and London: HarperCollins, 1993).

58. William C. Young, "The Ka'ba, Gender, and the Rites of Pilgrimage," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993): 286, discusses how sacred texts and rituals establish a "hierarchy of piety" by overturning "social distinctions (between rich and poor and governors and governed)." See also Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 57, on the motif of inversion in the lives of late imperial women saints.

59. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 156–58, for a discussion of the Christian reworking of classical gender expectations.

60. For an introduction to the textual tradition, see Graham Gould, "The Community and the Text," chap. 1 in *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

61. For example, the *Regula Sancti Benedictii*, 42 (Latin text with French translation by Adalbert de Vogüé, SC 182.584), required a public reading of the

desert *vitae* during meals: “. . . si tempus fuerit prandii, mox surrexerint a cena, sedeant omnes in unum et legat unus Collationes vel Vitas Patrum aut certe aliud quod aedificet audientes.”

62. Jerome, *Vitae Patrum*, PL 23.17–60; Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, PL 21.387–462; Egeria, *Itinera*, CSEL 39; Cassian, *Conlationes (Conferences)*, CSEL 13; Cassian, *Institutiones Coenobiorum (Institutes)*, CSEL 17; and Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, ed. Cuthbert Butler, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898 and 1904).

63. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 6.9; translation from Price, *History of the Monks of Syria*, 66.

64. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, 8.

65. Rufinus (*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, 5.6) asserts that there were 20,000 nuns living in Oxyrhynchus in the early fifth century. Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Historia Religiosa*, 30.6) states that there are numerous ascetic “wrestling schools” sprinkled throughout Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.

66. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 29.4; translation from Price, *History of the Monks of Syria*, 184. See also Harvey, “Women in Byzantine Hagiography,” in *That Gentle Strength*, ed. Coon, Haldane, and Sommer, 38.

67. For example, see the life of Eugenia (*Vita S. Eugeniae*, PL 73.602–24), who became the abbot of a male monastery. For discussions of the transvestite convention, see Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 290–91; Evelyn Patlagean, “L’Histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l’évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance,” *Studi Medievali* 17 (1976): 597–623; John Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,” *Viator* 5 (1974): 1–32; and Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 213–17.

68. Harvey (“Women in Byzantine Hagiography,” 45) says that, “as women had been the source of sin through Eve, they could also be the source of salvation through Mary, the Second Eve. In hagiography, women become the weak made strong, the unworthy made worthy, the foolish made wise, the sensual made spiritual.”

69. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 29.5. Theodoret himself claims to have “dug through” the door of the cell in order to visit the two women.

70. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 30.2; translation from Price, *History of the Monks of Syria*, 186–87.

71. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 26.10.

72. See Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 149.

73. Author’s translation of Jerome, *Epistle*, 66.6, PL 22.642; “Quis enim hoc crederet, ut Consulum pronepos, et Furiani germinis decus, inter purpuras Senatorum, furva tunica pullatus incederet, et non erubesceret oculos sodalium, et deridentes se ipse derideret?”

74. Satius esse illum in infamia relinqui ac sordibus quam infirmo iudicio committi”: Cicero, *Epistula ad Atticum*, I.16.2, in *M. Tullii Ciceronis Epistulae*, vol. 2.1, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, ed. W. S. Watt, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis Series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 23. Julia Heskell, “Cicero as Evidence for Attitudes to Dress in the Late Republic,” in *The World of Roman*

Costume, ed. Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 141–42, discusses Cicero's rhetorical uses of the *pulla* (which could have been black or grey), and the *sordes*, or a toga that had been smeared with ash or dirt. She claims that donning the *sordes* could also be interpreted as an act of political protest.

75. Shelley Stone, "The Toga: From National Costume to Ceremonial Costume," in *The World of Roman Costume*, ed. Sebesta and Bonfante, 15.

76. Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 165.

77. Scholars have provided a variety of explanations for the conversion of Roman women to a life of radical renunciation. For a summary of the historiographical traditions, see Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 81ff.

78. Jerome, *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae*, CSEL 55(2).306–51. Jerome wrote the life after Paula's death (404 CE) and dedicated the *epitaphium* to her daughter Eustochium.

79. Katharina M. Wilson and Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1990), 27.

80. Cited by Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 134.

81. For a discussion of Juvenal and the reversal of the Roman matron *topos*, see Wilson and Makowski, *Wykked Wyves*, 21–34.

82. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, SC 133–35. For a detailed discussion of Sulpicius, see Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 15ff.

83. Raymond Van Dam (*Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985], 137) argues that Martin's life is transitional because later episcopal hagiographers modified Martin's image from that of "iconoclastic innovator and prophet" to that of miracle worker, monk, bishop, almsgiver, missionary, and healer.

84. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, SC 133–35. English translation by Bernard M. Peebles, *The Dialogues of Sulpicius Severus*, Fathers of the Church Series 7 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1949), 161–251.

85. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 1.23.

86. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 1.23; translation from Peebles, *Dialogues of Sulpicius Severus*, 193.

87. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, 127ff.

88. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 9; translation from F. R. Hoare, "The Life of Saint Martin of Tours," in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 12.

89. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 1.24.

90. Constantius of Lyons, *Vita Germani episcopi Autissiodorensis*, MGH SRM 7.247–83. English translation by F. R. Hoare, "Life of Germanus of Auxerre," in *Soldiers of Christ*, ed. Noble and Head, 77–106.

91. Including those at Arles, Poitiers, Tours, Chelles, Nivelles, Faremoutiers, Maubeuge, Laon, Metz, Pavilly, and Marchiennes.

92. “Aliqua de sororibus vidit supra murum milia milium daemonum in specie caprarum adstare; ubi sancta dexteram beatam cum signo crucis elevavit, omnis illa multitudo daemonum fugata nusquam comparuit”: Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 18 (MGH SRM 2.390); translation from Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, with E. Gordon Whatley, eds. and trans., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 100.

93. Venantius Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 34 (MGH SRM 2.375). Translation from McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 84.

94. “Et ostendit civitatem Dei altissimi et duodecim sedes apostolorum ex auro gemmisque rutilantes”: *Vita Saldaberga abbatisae Laudunensis*, 26 (MGH SRM 5.65).

95. “Post nocturnas et matutinas vigilias una soror de locis monasterii cum se sopori dedisset, mysticam ostendit ei Deus visionem quasi sanctae memoriae B. Aldegunda adstetisset ante altare in loco Sacerdotis et oblationes Missales manibus in calicem fregisset”: *Vita Aldegundis, abbatisae Malbodiensis*, 25, *Acta Sanctorum Belgii selecta* 4 (Bruxelles: Matthaei Lemaire, 1783–1794), 323. McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley (*Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 235) discuss this mystical event (251 n. 59).

96. *Vita S. Burgundofaræ*, 19. The life is an extract from the seventh-century *Vita S. Columbani abbatis discipulorumque eius, Liber II*, by Jonas of Bobbio (MGH SRM 4.130–43). McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 161, discuss this passage.

97. *Vita Genovefæ*, 6 (MGH SRM 3.217).

98. Jo Ann McNamara discusses early medieval women’s charity and power in “The Need to Give: Suffering and Female Sanctity in the Middle Ages,” in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 199–204.

99. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 25.

100. See Magdalena Elizabeth Carrasco, “Spirituality in Context: The Romanesque Illustrated Life of St. Radegund of Poitiers,” *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990): 414–35.

Chapter 2

1. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), xi. For a discussion of the transmission of biblical texts in the early medieval West, see Patrick McGurk, “The Oldest Latin Manuscripts of the Bible,” in *The Early Medieval Bible*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–23.

2. For the early Judaic and patristic interpretations and the impact of urbanization on Hebrew spirituality, see Carole Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), chaps. 4 and 5; Brown, *Body and Society*, 94–96; Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988); and Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, chap. 3.

3. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* (*City of God*), 14.17, CC 47.437. See Brown, *Body and Society*, 416.

4. Discussed by Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 88, 155. Meeks notes that the “garments of skins of the original couple” refer to their physical bodies in contrast to their garments of light or their “image of God” (155). See also Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 96.

5. For a discussion of the change from subsistence hill farming to metropolitan opulence, see Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, chaps. 3–8.

6. Mircea Eliade (*The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask [New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1987], 135) argues “all ritual nudity implies an atemporal model, a paradisaical image.”

7. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 1.17.

8. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 41. Classical rhetoric similarly connects the opulence of women with urban decadence. The Roman historian Livy (*Ab Urbe Condita*, 34.1ff) used the *luxuria muliebris* as the antithesis of masculine Republicanism; see Alexander Hugh McDonald, ed., *Titi Livi ab Urbe Condita*, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 173ff.

9. “Jezebel” may be a Hebrew perversion of a Phoenician name which was connected with the worship of the fertility God, Ba’al. Like Jezebel, Solomon’s “old wives” influence him to worship the cult of Ba’al’s consort, Ashe’rah (1 Kings 11.4).

10. For example, in the fourth-century *vita* of Ambrose of Milan (Paulinus, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, 11ff, in M. S. Kaniecka, ed. and trans., *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, Patristic Studies 16 [Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1928]; English translation also available in F. R. Hoare, *The Western Fathers* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1954], 149–88) the empress Justina is Jezebel to Ambrose’s Elijah.

11. Hairstyles are associated in scripture with the following attributes: physical strength (Judges 16.19); spiritual vows (Numbers 6.5; Acts 18.18); depravity (1 Peter 3.3; Revelation 9.8); sexual attractiveness (Song of Songs 4.1); contrition (Isaiah 3.24; Jeremiah 7.29; Micah 1.16); mourning (Luke 7.38; John 11.2); ritual purity (Leviticus 10.6; Numbers 6.5; Ezekiel 44.20); impurity (Leviticus 13.3–4); and earthly hierarchies (1 Corinthians 11.6, 14–15; 1 Timothy 2.9; 1 Peter 3.3).

12. See Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, chap. 1, for a discussion of the historiography.

13. Because late antique and early medieval church writers attributed all of the Pauline epistles to the apostle himself, the contested authenticity of particular letters is not a crucial issue here. For discussions of the dating and authorship of the letters, see Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 7–8; and Robin Lane Fox, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 130–36.

14. Schüssler-Fiorenza discusses the various interpretations in chap. 6 of *In Memory of Her*. See also Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 88–89, 155.

15. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 55.

16. Most scholars agree that 1–2 Timothy were not written by Paul, and that 1–2 Peter were not written by the apostle Peter.

17. For a discussion of the archaeological evidence for Paul’s descriptions of male and female hairstyles, see Cynthia L. Thompson, “Hairstyles, Head-coverings,

and St. Paul: Portraits from Roman Corinth,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 51 (1988): 99–115. Thompson proposes that Paul refuses to allow men to cover their heads because this was the practice of contemporary Roman pagan cults. She also suggests that first-century Roman women could choose whether to veil or not, and that Paul is upholding the Judeo-Syrian custom of veiling, perhaps even while in the home. See also Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 126.

18. For a discussion of this passage and its gender implications, see Bernadette Brooten, “Paul’s Views on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism,” in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa Atkinson, Constance Buchanan, and Margaret Miles (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 75–78.

19. See Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 90–104, 257 n. 76.

20. Brooten, “Paul’s Views on the Nature of Women,” 78. See also Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 26–27.

21. In Revelation 9.8, the plague-bearing locusts possess women’s hair.

22. Although the rhetoric of 1 Timothy 3.2–4, 3.12 appears to be directed at pastoral men, 1 Timothy 3.12 and 1 Timothy 5.3ff contain possible references to pastoral women.

23. From Colish, “Cosmetic Theology.”

24. Tertullian, *De habitu muliebri* (Ch. I); *De cultu feminarum* (Ch. II), in CC 1.343–70. *De virginibus velandis*, in CC 2.1209–1226. English translation of *De habitu muliebri* and *De cultu feminarum* available by Edwin A. Quain, “The Apparel of Women,” Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, trans., in *Disciplinary, Moral, and Ascetical Works*, Fathers of the Church 40 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 117–49. English translation of *De virginibus velandis* available by S. Thelwall, “On the Veiling of Virgins,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, 4, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), 27–37. Tertullian also wrote a treatise on the sacred vestments of the Hebrew high priest (*de Aaron vestibus*) which unfortunately has not survived.

25. Tertullian, *De habitu muliebri*, 1.2. Bloch in *Medieval Misogyny* (40) discusses this passage in terms of women’s covetousness of fashion.

26. Tertullian, *De habitu muliebri*, 1.2; translation from Quain, “The Apparel of Women,” 118.

27. Tertullian, *De habitu muliebri*, 2.1.

28. The exact meaning of 1 Corinthians 11.10 is unclear. Biblical exegetes have interpreted this passage to be indicative of the angelic order of the universe and that the veiling of women’s heads supports the divine hierarchy.

29. Tertullian, *De habitu muliebri*, 3.1.

30. Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*, 7.2; and *De virginibus velandis*, 7–8, 15.

31. Tertullian, *De habitu muliebri*, 1.3; translation from Quain, “The Apparel of Women,” 118.

32. Cyprian, *De habitu virginum*, 5, PL 4.439–64. English translation by Angela Elizabeth Keenan, “The Dress of Virgins,” in *Treatises*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, Fathers of the Church 36 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958), 31–52.

33. Cyprian, *De habitu virginum*, 5; translation from Keenan, “The Dress of Virgins,” 35.

34. Cyprian, *De habitu virginum*, 5.

35. Jerome, *Epistle*, 22.32.

36. “Solent quaedam, cum futuram virginem spoponderint, pulla tunica eam induere et furvo operire palliolo, auferre linteamina, nihil in collo, nihil in capite auri sinere re vera bono consilio”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 128.2.

37. Although clearly, as Suzanne Wemple notes in *Women in Frankish Society* (142), the difference between episcopal legislation and actual practice could be quite extensive.

38. “Mulier, quamvis docta et sancta, viros in conventu docere non praesumat”: Ancient Statutes of the Church (475), canon 37, CC 148.172; and “Sanctimonialis virgo, cum ad consecrationem sui episcopo offertur, in talibus vestibus applicetur qualibus semper usura est, professioni et sanctimoniae aptis”: canon 99, CC 148.184. Also, “Viduitatis servandae professionem coram episcopo in secretario habitam imposita ab episcopo veste viduali indicandam”: Council of Orange (441), canon 26, CC 148.85. Pope Gregory the Great ordered the wives of the major orders to wear dress that was symbolic of their commitment to God, *Registrum Epistularum*, 9.197, MGH EPP 2.185–86; cited by Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 132.

39. “Sanctimoniales, quamlibet vita earum et mores probati sint, ante annum aetatis suae quadragesimum non velentur”: Council of Agde (506), canon 19, CC 148.202. See also Council of Epaon in Burgundy (517), canon 38, CCL 148(A).34.

40. “Hic Bonifatius constituit ut nulla mulier aut monacha pallam sacramentatam contingere aut lavare aut incensum ponere in ecclesia nisi minister”: L’Abbé L. Duschene, ed., *Le Liber Pontificalis: Texte, introduction et commentaire* 1 (Paris: E. De Billard, 1955), 227; and “Hic constituit ut monacha non acciperit velaminis capitis benedictionem, nisi probata fuerit in virginitate LX annorum”: *Liber Pontificalis*, 1.239.

41. “Non licet mulieri nudam manum eucharistiam accipere,” and “Non licet, ut mulier manum suam ad pallam Dominicam mittat”: Council of Auxerre (561–605), canon 36 and canon 37, CC 148(A).269. For Anglo-Saxon parallels, see the seventh-century *Theodore’s Penitential*, 7.1, in John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).

42. Council of Gangra, canons 13 and 17, in E. J. Percival, trans., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 14 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977), 93, 97, 99. Peter Brown (*Body and Society*, 288–99) discusses Gangra’s condemnation of cross-dressing. See also Elm, *Virgins of God*, 108ff, for a discussion of the historical background of Gangra.

43. Theodosius, *Theodosiani Libri XVI (Codex) cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, 16.27.1, ed. Theodor Mommsen and P. M. Meyer (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1905). English translation by Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969).

44. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 32–33; English translation in *The Lausiaca*

History of Palladius, trans. Robert T. Meyer, Ancient Christian Writers 34 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1965), 92–96.

45. Caesarius of Arles, *Regula Virginum*, SC 345. For a discussion of the women's community and the Rule by Caesarius, see William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 117–24. Klingshirn also discusses the foundation at Arles, 104–10.

46. Venantius Fortunatus referred to Caesarius's rule as sweet as a vestment of linen; see Dom Georges Marié, "Sainte Radegonde et le milieu monastique contemporain," in *Études Mérovingiennes: Actes de Journée de Poitiers 1er–3 Mai, 1952* (Paris: Éditions A. et J. Picard, 1953), 224. Caesarius himself used the image of wool and linen to signify the flesh and the spirit ("Lana carnale aliquid significat, linum spiritale"); Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* 139.2, CC 103.572.

47. For the text and detailed analysis of the rule, see Maria Caritas McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of Caesarius of Arles* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1960). McCarthy suggests that Caesarius probably used Augustine's rule and Cassian's *Institutes* as sources for his own rule (8). See also Adalbert de Vogüé, "La Règle de Césaire d'Arles pour les moines: un résumé de sa Règle pour les moniales," *Révêue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 47 (1971): 369–406.

48. Definition of *bombycine* in McCarthy, *Rule for Nuns*, 45. The ban on mixed yarns parallels Kosher restrictions on mixing fabrics.

49. Other early medieval women's rules contain similar stipulations. See the seventh-century rule of Donatus of Besançon, *Regula ad virgines*, PL 87.273–98; and the late sixth-century rule of Leander of Seville, *Regula ad virgines*, PL 72.873–94. For a translation of Donatus's *Regula*, see Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg, "The Rule of Donatus of Besançon: A Working Translation," *Vox Benedictina* 2 (April/July 1985): 85–107; 181–203. In the East, Basil's rule emphasized women's involvement in textile production and a unique "female dress"; see Elm, *Virgins of God*, 72ff.

50. In the *Vita Genovefae* 6 (MGH SRM 3.217), the bishop Germanus of Auxerre gives the young Genovefa a copper coin inscribed with the cross to replace the customary opulent adornments of her sex, and another woman comes to Genovefa and asks the holy woman to "change her clothing." For a recent analysis of this text see Martin Heinzelmann and Joseph-Claude Poulin, *Les Vies anciennes de sainte Genève de Paris: Etudes critiques*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études IV^e Section Sciences Historiques et Philologiques 329 (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1986). See also the tenth-century life of Rictrude of Marchiennes (*Vita S. Rictrudis*, 15, AS, May 12.84) for a detailed sermon on the eschatological dress of women.

51. For example, Gregory of Tours (*Gloria Confessorum*, 16, MGH SRM 1.2.306–7) recounts the legend of the transvestite holy woman Papula.

52. Christ left his linen garments in the empty tomb to be discovered by the apostles, just as Elijah abandoned his hairy mantle before ascending into heaven.

53. *Vita S. Austrebertae virginis* (eighth century) 6, AS February, 10.417; and *Vita S. Glodesindae* (mid-ninth century) 10, AS July, 25.204. For datings of texts and textual history, see McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 137, 304.

54. The veiling of women has recently been interpreted to have many social,

economic, political, and theological meanings. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 14–15; and Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10. Both Ahmud and Lerner note that ancient Mesopotamian veils indicated the sexual, social, and economic status, as well as the age, of the wearer.

55. *Vita S. Glodesindae*, 10, and *Vita S. Austrubertae virginis*, 12.

56. *Vita S. Rusticulae* (seventh century [?]) 19, MGH SRM 4.347. For a later woman saint who has a braided hair relic, see the twelfth-century *vita* and *acta* of Hildegard von Bingen, which claim that the saint's hair miraculously heals the sick and survives a church fire (Gottfried and Theodoric, *Vita S. Hildegardis*, 41, PL 119–20; *Acta Inquisitionis de virtutibus et miraculis sanctae Hildegardis*, 5, PL 197.136–35).

57. David Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), xiii.

58. Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria*, 13. Herlihy also discusses the classical metaphors (12ff).

59. Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*, 13.7.

60. “Deus mulieribus dedit texturae sapientiam”: Ambrose, *Exameron*, 5.9.11; quoted in Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria*, 1. See also Jerome, *Epistle*, 128.1; and Sidonius Apollonaris, *Ephithalamium*, 15.126ff; cited by Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria*, 19–20.

61. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones*, 139.6, CC 103.574–575. The sermon contains Caesarius's exegesis on Proverbs 31, the “good wife.”

62. Benedict of Nursia, *Regula Sancti Benedicti*, 55.

63. *Vita S. Hesychii* is part of the *Passio S. Romani*, in Hippolyte Delchaye, “S. Romain martyr de Antioch,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 50 (1932): 269–70; cited by Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria*, 8. There are, however, examples of male saints who weave, particularly desert hermits who wove baskets, palm leaves, and even linen; according to Palladius (*Historia Lausiaca*, 41), the monks of Nitria wove linen. Weaving was, according to Herlihy (*Opera Muliebria*, 3, 7–8), an occupation for male slaves in Roman Egypt and the Mediterranean. The desert inversion of work roles reflects perhaps both an economic reality and the world upside down motif of the *vita Christi*.

64. For a discussion of the public humiliation of the two male saints, see John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994), 148.

65. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 14.

66. Melania's *vita* is replete with examples of charitable deeds (Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, SC 90).

67. Gregory of Tours, *Gloria Confessorum*, 104.

68. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 30.

69. *Vita S. Chrothildis reginae francorum*, 12 (MGH SRM 2.346–47). The text is a Carolingian redaction (late ninth or tenth century) of an earlier Merovingian legend.

70. *Vita S. Eustadiolae viduae*, 3, in the life of Saint Sulpicius of Bourges, AS June 8.131–33. The text is probably early eighth century (see McNamara et al., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 106).

71. Rufinus, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, I.7–8, PL 21.475–78. See also E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–460* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 44.

72. For the *karakallion* as slave's hood, see Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 46.3.

73. Holum, *Theodosian Emperresses*, 26.

74. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 17, 19.

75. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 2.6.

76. *Vita S. Austrebertae virginis*, 10, AS February, 10.2.421.

77. For a discussion of the “housekeeping saint” *topos*, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 171.

78. Discussed by Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 18ff; and Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 61–63.

79. Craig S. Farmer, “Changing Images of the Samaritan Woman,” *Church History* 65.3 (1996): 365–375, traces the exegetical tradition concerning the Samaritan woman, from patristic authors to Protestant commentators.

80. Boswell (*Same-Sex Unions*, 11) discusses John 4.4–30, and its use of the ambiguous Greek, *aner/andros*. See also Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*, 26–28; and Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 138.

81. For a discussion of this passage, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*, 16–20.

82. Frederick Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 21.

83. Discussed by Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*, 21–23.

84. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 1.13. Monastic rituals, liturgical performances, and even architectural structures symbolically represent the special relationship between faithful women and Christ's resurrection. Carolingian liturgical plays recreated the passion and resurrection, and monks assumed the role of the mourning Marys. The grave slabs of high medieval English nuns often contain images of the three Marys at Christ's tomb. Archaeologists have suggested that the double-story refectories of English nunneries may represent the “upper room” (Acts 1.13) where female disciples and male apostles stayed after Christ's death. And the sacred space of medieval monastic churches may have been gender-ordered, with the women's place located to the north as symbolic of the place where the Virgin stood at the cross. See Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 64, and Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, 31, 166, 135ff, for the evidence of high medieval English nunneries.

85. Egeria, *Itinera*, 24.9–10. See also Gary Vikan, “Pilgrim in Magis' Clothing: The Impact of Mimesis on Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 100.

86. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 58.

87. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.9. Later Frankish hagiographers emulate this motif. For example, nuns of the double monastery of Clion kiss every place where Martin had slept, stood, or sat and distribute the straw of his bedding (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 2.7), and Monegund of Tours “prostrates herself on the ground as though humbly to lick the Lord's footprints” (see Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.1, MGH SRM 1.2.287).

88. For Helena's procurement of the *lignum crucis*, see Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio* (395 CE), CSEL 73(7).371–401. Borgehammar (*How the Holy Cross*

Was Found) details the development of the Helena legend. Gregory of Tours also cites the legend, *Decem libri historiarum*, 1.34; *In Gloria Martyrum*, 5.

89. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 16. Baudonivia highlights Radegund's procurement of the *lignum crucis* both because of the Christological importance of the relic and because of its imperial associations. See Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 30–41.

90. Paulinus of Nola, *Epistle*, 31.1, CSEL 29(1).268; and Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, 30, SC 178.240–42. See also Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 129, 134.

91. *Vita S. Rusticulae*, 8, 12.

92. Holy women wash and dress the body of Lupicinus (Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 13.3), and in the *vita* of Anstrude, the holy woman buries the dead (*Vita Anstrudis abbatissae Laudunensis*, 4, MGH SRM 6.68). In many saints' lives, women safeguard the relics of holy men. For example, Gregory of Tours recounts that a pious woman kept the sandals of the martyr Epipodius of Lyons (*Gloria Confessorum*, 63); the holy woman Meratina collects the turf at the tomb of bishop Gallus, puts it in her garden, and cures the sick with the tea she makes from it (Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 6.7). See also Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum*, 13, 30, 54, for Frankish women who collect the relics of male saints. For a detailed discussion of the early medieval rituals of burial, see Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with the Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), chap. 1, "The Burial of the Dead."

93. Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 5.21.

94. See Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 51–73, for details of women's role in preserving familial *memoria* and mourning the dead.

95. Clearly, devotion to the dead body of Christ is not a uniquely female trait. Male saints similarly visit the biblical sites of the passion and crucifixion and nurture relics of the holy cross. When hagiographers choose to focus on women's role in the cult of the holy dead, their textual portraits evoke the pious care of Christ's body by the women at the tomb.

Chapter 3

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1. Similarly, the fourth-century Emperor (and Pontifex Maximus) Julian ordered his Roman priests not to display their sacred dress in public. See Julian, *Letter to a Priest*, trans. W. C. Wright, in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1913–1923), 1:332–35. Cited by Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante, eds., *World of Roman Costume*, 4–5.

2. For a detailed discussion of sanctified material culture in Hebrew sacred writings, see Rabbi Shalom Dov Steinberg, *The Mishkan and the Holy Garments*, trans. Rabbi Moshe Miller (Jerusalem: Toras Chaim Institute, 5752 [1992]). For the symbolic garments of ancient Hebrew priests, see Moshe Greenberg, *Lessons on Exodus* (New York: Melton Research Center Publications, 1974), 328–46.

3. Jerome, *Commentaria in Ezechielem prophetam*, PL 25.427–44.

4. “Sancta sanctorum,” from Council of Tours (567), canon 4, CC 148(A).178. There exist several editions of early church councils. For the entire corpus, see Joannes Dominicus Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, 31 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck—u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960), hereafter cited as Mansi; for the Gallic corpus, see Charles Munier, ed., *Concilia Galliae, a. 314–a.506*, CC 148, and Caroli De Clercq, ed., *Concilia Galliae, a.511–a.695*, CC 148(A). For a French translation of the church councils, see Karl Joseph von Hefele and Henri Leclercq, trans., *Histoire des conciles d’après les documents originaux*, 26 vols. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–). For an English translation, see Karl Joseph von Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte. English*, 5 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1972). For the papal decrees, see Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis*. English translation by Raymond Davis, *The Book of the Pontiffs*, Translated Texts for Historians Latin Series, vol. 5 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989).

5. See the General Council of Toledo (633), canon 41, and the fourth council at Braga (late seventh century), canon 6, Hefele and Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, 3.623, 657.

6. Although the Hebrew Bible provided the foundation for later Christian conceptualizations of sacred vestments and objects, Christians did not attempt to emulate the intricate vestments of the Hebrew priests until the advent of the Ottonian and Capetian sacral monarchies. See Percy Schramm, *Kaiser, Könige und Päpste*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiesemann, 1968), 1.75.

7. Wool causes the body to perspire, and therefore it is unclean: “They shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat” (Ezekiel 44.20).

8. For a discussion of artistic depictions of Jesus’ dress, see Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 28, 38, 101.

9. Also noted by Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 180. Mathews (123ff) discusses artistic representations of Christ’s hair.

10. John R. Clarke, “The Warren Cup and the Contexts for Representations of Male-to-Male Lovemaking in Augustan and Early Julio-Claudian Art,” *Art Bulletin* 75 (1992), 290. See also Sebesta and Bonfante, eds., *World of Roman Costume*, 7.

11. On the toga, see Shelley Stone, “The Toga: From National to Ceremonial Costume,” in *World of Roman Costume*, ed. Sebesta and Bonfante, 13–45; Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984), 12–13; Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 129; and August Friedrich von Pauly and Georg Wissowa, eds., *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 60 vols. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1895–1953), Band VIA, s.v. “toga,” 1651–60.

12. Theodosius, *Theodosiana Libri XVI*, 14.10.1–4.

13. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11.3.184, in *M. Fabi Quintiliani Institu-*

tionis Oratoriae Libri Duodecim, ed. M. Winterbottom, *Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 690.

14. For Quintilian on rhetorical performance, see Fritz Graf, “The Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators,” in *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 36–58. See also Stone, “The Toga: From National to Ceremonial Costume,” in *World of Roman Costume*, ed. Sebesta and Bonfante, 17.

15. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, II.3.131.

16. Serious men must allow the toga to fall to the middle of the shin: “Pars eius prior mediis cruribus optime terminatur.” Insane men wrap the toga around their left hand or gird themselves with it. Effeminate throw the bottom of the garment over their right shoulders. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, II.3.139ff.

17. Tertullian, *De Pallio*, CC 2.733–50. English translation by S. Thelwall available in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4.5–12. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, II.3.131, 139ff. A sixth-century writer also deals with symbolic male garb; see Germanus of Paris, *De Vestimentis*, in *Ordo Antiquus Gallicanus: Der gallikanische Messritus des 6. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Klaus Gamber, *Textus Patristici et Liturgici* 3 (Regensburg: Verlag Friederick Pustet, 1965), 21–23.

18. Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, II–12. A number of scholars have noted that late antique ecclesiastical vestments derived from the tunics of Roman women and elderly men; see Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, 212.

19. The Council of Gangra (340–345), canon 12, in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Percival, 97, castigates false ascetics who wear the *pallium*. Peter Brown discusses the social messages behind Gangra’s decrees on spiritual dress and hairstyles; see *Body and Society*, 288.

20. Tertullian, *De Pallio*, 5.

21. The following discussion is indebted to Marcia Colish’s article on “Cosmetic Theology.”

22. Colish, “Cosmetic Theology,” 5. See also, Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 126, and Sebesta and Bonfante, eds., *World of Roman Costume*, 5–6.

23. Klingshirn (*Caesarius of Arles*, 97–104) details the circumstances surrounding the Gallic Council of Agde (506).

24. The Council of Paris (post 614), canon 2, CC 148(A).287, states that altars can be consecrated only in churches where there are relics of saints. The *ciborium* is a dome suspended above the altar and supported by columns, see *Liber Pontificalis*, I.262, 312, 324, and 375.

25. “*Altaria vero placuit non solum unctione chrismatis sed etiam sacerdotali benedictione sacrari*”: Council of Agde (506), canon 14, CC 148.200. Also, “*Altaria nisi lapidea crismatis unctione non sacrentur*”: Council at Epaon (517), canon 26, CC 148(A).30; and “*Ut altaria alibi consecrari non debeant nisi in his tantum ecclesiis, ubi corpora sepulta*”: Council of Paris (post 614), canon 2, CC 148(A).287.

26. “*Basilicas hereticorum, quas tanta execrationem habemus exosas, ut pollutionem earum purgabilem non putemus, sanctis usibus adplicare dispicimus. Sane quas per violentiam nostris tulerant, possumus revocare*”: Council of Epaon (517), canon 33, CC 148(A).33.

27. The Council of Laodicea (mid-fourth century), canon 19, PL 56.717,

states that only those who offer sacrifice are allowed to approach the altar; and the Council of Toledo (675), canon 13, Mansi II.145–146, decrees that no possessed person may officiate at the altar.

28. Council of Lyons (567), canon 4, CC 148(A).202.

29. “Hic constituit ut sacrificium altaris non in siricum neque in pannum tinctum celebraretur, nisi tantum in lineum terrenum procreatum, sicut corpus domini nostri Iesu Christi in sindonem lineam mundam sepultus est: sic missas caelebrarentur”: *Liber Pontificalis*, I.171.

30. *Liber Pontificalis*, I.271, 276, 285, and 343.

31. “Observandum, ne pallis vel ministeriis divinis defunctorum corpuscula obvolvuntur”: Council of Clermont (535), canon 3, CC 148(A).106; and “Ne operatorio dominici corporis sacerdotes unquam corpus, dum ad tumulum evehetur, obtegatur et sacro velamine usibus suis reddeto, dum honorantur corpora, altaria polluantur”: Council of Clermont, canon 7, CC 148(A).107; also, “Non licet mortuis nec eucharistia nec usculum tradi nec de vela vel pallas corpora eorum involvi”: Council of Auxerre (561–565), canon 12, CC 148(A).267.

32. *Liber Pontificalis*, I.220, 230, and 232.

33. Council of Vaison (442), canon 3, CC 148.97; also, “Quoniam non oportet insacratos ministros licentiam habere in secretarium, quod Graeci diaconicon appellant, ingredi et contingere vasa dominica”: Council of Agde (506), canon 66, CC 148.228.

34. “Ne ad nuptiarum ornatu ministeria divina praestentur et, dum improborum tactu vel pompa saecularis luxuriae polluuntur, ad officia sacri mysterii videantur indigna”: Council of Clermont (535), canon 8, CC 148(A).107.

35. See Robin Lane Fox in *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 504. For linen as the *signum* of Christ’s burial, see the *Liber Pontificalis*, I.171.

36. *Liber Pontificalis*, I.118.

37. “Hic ex praecepto beati Petri suscepit ecclesiae pontificatum gubernandi, sicut ei fuerat a domino Iesu Christo cathedra tradita vel commissa”: *Liber Pontificalis*, I.123.

38. The *Liber Pontificalis* (1.375 and 383) claims that certain popes gave the *ambo* to important churches. Mathews (*Clash of the Gods*, 113–14) discusses the relationship between the *cathedra* and episcopal power.

39. Klingshirn (*Caesarius of Arles*, 151–59), details the awesome nature of the sacred space of the basilica of St. Stephen in Arles. See also Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 94ff.

40. Mayo, *History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, 20–21.

41. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 8.5.

42. “Hic constituit sacerdotes et levitas ut vestes sacratas in usu cottidiano non uti, nisi in ecclesia”: *Liber Pontificalis*, I.154.

43. “Qui et constituit ut quicumque de fidelium martyrem sepeliret, sine dalmaticam aut colobium purpuratum nulla ratione sepeliret, quod tamen usque ad notitiam sibi devulgaretur”: *Liber Pontificalis*, I.159.

44. “Hic constituit ut diaconi dalmaticas in ecclesia uterentur et pallea linostima leva eorum tegerentur”: *Liber Pontificalis*, I.171.

45. See Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles*, 99–100.

46. “Hic constituit ut si quis desideraret in ecclesia militare aut proficere, ut esset lector annos XXX, exorcista dies XXX, acolitus annos V, subdiaconus annos V, custus martyrum annos X, diaconus annos VII, presbiter annos III, probatus ex omni parte, etiam et a foris qui sunt, testimonium habere bonum, unius uxoris virum, uxorem a sacerdote benedictam, et sic ad ordinem episcopatus accedere”: *Liber Pontificalis*, 1.171–72. Later church councils, such as Braga (563), canon 20, underscored that laymen must rise through the orders until they reach the office of bishop (*sacerdotium*). The Council of Orléans (533), canon 16, CC 148(A).101, denies ordination to the uneducated (*sine literis*); and the Council of Orléans (538), canon 6, CC 148(A).116–117, dictates the appropriate ages for ordination. See also Klingshirn’s discussion of the Council of Agde (506), *Caesarius of Arles*, 99–100.

47. The Council of Toledo (633), canon 28 (Hefele and LeClercq, eds., *Histoire des Conciles*, 3.623) assigns rank by dress and material objects. The bishop wears an *orarium*, ring, and staff; priests wear the *orarium* and *planetia*; deacons wear the *orarium* and alb; and subdeacons carry the paten and chalice. This same council (canon 39) emphasized that seating in the choir was by rank.

48. The Council of Agde (506), canon 20, CC 148.202, declared that all clerical dress must be under the supervision of superior officers of the church (“Clerici qui comam nutriunt, ab archidiacono, etiam si noluerint, inviti detundantur; vestimenta vel calceamenta etiam eis nisi quae religionem deceant, uti vel habere non liceat”).

49. The Council of Laodicaea, canon 22 and canon 23, PL 56.717.

50. *Liber Pontificalis*, 1.177.

51. “Monacho uti orarium in monasterio vel cyanchas habere non liceat”: Council of Arles (511), canon 20, CC148(A).10. The *cyanchas* were a kind of barbarian boot; see Mayo, *History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, 21.

52. The Council of Agde (506), canon 27, CC 148.205, decreed that bishops must approve all new convents and monasteries. The Council of Arles (511) contains several canons which place abbots and priests under the control of the episcopacy. For example, canon 22, CC 148(A).11, states that no monk may build a cell without the permission of either the bishop or abbot. Also, “Abbates pro humilitate religionis in episcoporum potestate consistant”: Council of Arles (511), canon 19, CC 148(A).10.

53. The Council of Mâcon (581), canon 5, CC 148(A).224.

54. For a discussion of the *pallium*, see *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie*, Band XVIII(3), s.v. “*pallium*,” 249–254; and Mayo, *History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, 13, 19, and 161ff.

55. For a discussion of the *paenula*, see Norma Goldman, “Reconstructing Roman Clothing,” in *World of Roman Costume*, ed. Sebesta and Bonfante, 229.

56. Hilary of Arles, *Sermo de vita sancti Honorati*, 35 (PL 50.1268–69), claims that threads from the saint’s vestments performed miracles.

57. “Ut episcopus sine palleo missas dicere non praesumat”: Council of Mâcon (585), canon 6, CC 148(A).224.

58. For an overview of the rhetorical uses of hairstyles, see Robert Bartlett, “Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages,” *Transactions of the Royal His-*

torical Society 4 (1994): 43–60. See also Conrad Leyser, “Long-Haired Kings and Short-Haired Nuns,” *Medieval World* 3/4 (1992): 37–42.

59. Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum*, 27. See Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, eds., *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris: Leclercq et Ané, 1903–1953), 2.2.2997. Both Hebrew and Roman cultures used shorn hair to symbolize humility. The ancient Hebrews shaved the head as a sign of repentance, and the Romans shaved the heads of manumitted slaves.

60. The Venerable Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts Series 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 25.

61. Stephanus, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi episcopi*, 6, in *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14. The Latin reads, “formulam in modum coronae spineae caput Christi cingentis.” Colgrave notes (12) that the *vita* of the Anglo-Saxon hermit, Cuthbert, contains the same passage. See also Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.21.

62. There are several such combs extant. At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, there are two liturgical combs, one from the Carolingian period and the other from the twelfth century. In the collected treasures of Durham Cathedral, Durham, England, there is an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon comb. The historians of material culture at the Victoria and Albert Museum suggest that the combs were used to symbolize the order of the divine universe.

63. Peter Lasko, “The Comb,” in *The Relics of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. C. F. Battiscombe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 336–56.

64. Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101.

65. Brown, “A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy,” in *Society and the Holy*, 300.

66. Brown, “Dark Age Crisis,” in *Society and the Holy*, 281.

67. “tulit pallium de collo eius et duxit in cubiculum; expolians eum induit eum vestem monachicam et abscondit eum”: *Liber Pontificalis*, 1.293.

68. Similarly, the Carolingians emasculated the last Merovingian king by shaving his head and dressing him in a monastic habit; see Einhard, *Vita Caroli*, 1, MGH SCR 2.443; “Gens Merovingorum, de qua Franci reges sibi creare soliti erant, usque in Hildericum regem, qui iussu Stephani, Romani pontificis, depositus ac detonsus, atque in monasterium trusus est, durasse putatur.”

69. Thomas F. X. Noble details the secular responsibilities of the Bishop of Rome in *The Republic of Saint Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680–825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 9–12.

70. Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, 106.

71. “Non licet mulieri nudam manum eucharistiam accipere”: Council of Auxerre (561–605), canon 36, CC 148(A).269. Klingshirn (*Caesarius of Arles*, 155) discusses Caesarius’s sermons concerning the washing of the hands and the wrapping of women’s hands in cloth.

72. For detailed discussions of sixth-century legislation, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, and Brian Brennan, “‘Episcopae’: Bishops’ Wives Viewed in Sixth-Century Gaul,” *Church History* 54 (1985): 311–23.

73. For example, Council of Clermont (535), canon 13, CC 148(A).108; Council of Tours (567), canon 13, CC 148(A).180–181; and Council of Mâcon (581–583), canon 3, CC 148(A).224.

74. “Germanitatis affectu”: Council of Clermont (535), canon 13, CCL 148A.108. For a discussion of early medieval hagiographical representations of spiritual marriage, see Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 68–73.

75. “In domum serpentem includere pro veste”: Council of Tours (567), canon 10, CC 148(A).179.

76. “Illud quoque rectum nobis visum est disponere, ut, quae uxor subdiaconi vel exorcistae vel acoliti fuerat, mortuo illo secundo se non audeat sotiari matrimonio. Quod si feceret, separetur et in coenubiis puellarum Dei tradatur et ibi usque ad exitum vitae suae permaneat”: Council of Mâcon (581), canon 16, CC 148(A).246.

77. Wemple (*Women in Frankish Society*, 136) also cites the eighth-century Bavarian Code (MGH Legum Sectio I.5.2.284–85) which accuses defiled women of causing plagues and famines, thus disrupting the divine order of the universe.

78. The Council of Laodicea (mid-fourth century), canon 11, PL 56.716, abolishes the female presbyters and elders. The Council of Nîmes (394), canon 2, CC 148.50, forbids women from ministering.

79. “Nihilominus impatienter audivimus tantum divinarum rerum subiisse despectum, ut feminae sacris altaribus ministrare ferantur; et cuncta quae non nisi virorum famulatu deputata sunt, sexum cui non competit exhibere”: Pope Gelasius, *Epistolae et decreta*, 9.26, PL 59.55.

80. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 140.

81. For the ordination of women deacons, see the Council of Nicaea (325), canon 19, Mansi 2.675–678. On the dismantling of the office, “Diaconae omnimodis non ordinandae: si quae iam sunt, benedictioni quae populo impenditur capita submittant”: Council of Orange (441), canon 25, CC 148.84; “Foeminae, quae benedictionem diaconatus actenus contra interdicta canonum acceperunt, si ad coniugium probantur iterum devolutae, a communione pellantur. Quod si huiusmodi contubernium admonitae ab episcopo cognito errore dissolverint, in communionis gratia acta penitentia revertantur”: Council of Orléans (533), canon 17, CC 148(A).101; and “Placuit etiam, ut nulli postmodum foeminae diaconalis benedictio pro conditionis huius fragilitate credatur”: Council of Orléans (533), canon 18, CC 148(A).101. See also Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 140.

82. Gilchrist (*Gender and Material Culture*, 20) notes, however, that nuns do appear in the historical record as sacristans.

83. Council of Laodicea (mid-fourth century), canon 45, PL 56.719.

84. “Ut laici secus altare, quo sancta misteria celebrantur, inter clericos tam ad vigiliis quam ad missas stare penitus non praesumant, sed pars illa, quae a cancellis versus altare dividitur, choris tantum psallentium pateat clericorum. Ad orandum et communicandum laicis et foeminis, sicut mos est, pateant sancta sanctorum”: Council of Tours (567), canon 4, CC 148(A).178. See also Robert A. Markus, “The Cult of Icons in Sixth-Century Gaul,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978): 135.

85. “Non licet mulieri nudam manum eucharistiam accipere”: Council of Auxerre (578), canon 36, CC 148(A).269; and “Non licet, ut mulier manum suam

ad pallam Dominicam mittat”: Council of Auxerre, canon 37, CC 148(A).269. Canon 42, CC 148(A).270, states that all women must bring a *dominicale* (a cloth with which to wrap the hands) to communion. Wemple (*Women in Frankish Society*, 142) cautions that this was not always carried out in the seventh century, particularly by nuns who made the linen *pallia* and often assisted at eucharist services.

86. “Hic Bonifatius constituit ut nulla mulier aut monacha pallam sacramentum contingere aut lavare aut incensum ponere in ecclesia nisi minister”: *Liber Pontificalis*, 1.227.

87. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, 109.

88. Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 207ff.

89. “Oratio super ancillas Dei quibus conversis vestimenta mutantur”: in *Gelasian Sacramentary*, no. 792, in L. C. Mohlberg, L. Eizenhöfer, and P. Siffrin, eds., *Liber Sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae ordinis anni circuli* (Cod. Vat. Reg. Lat. 316/Paris Bibl. Nat. 7193, 41/56), *Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta, fontes*, 4 (Rome: Herder, 1960). For exorcism, see *Gelasian Sacramentary*, nos. 293–97. Women are linked to the Body of the Church through God and Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; men are led through the Holy Spirit. See also Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200–1150* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 151.

90. Pope Symmachus constructed a *matroneum* at St. Paul’s in Rome; see *Liber Pontificalis*, 1.262.

91. See Thomas Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 130–34.

92. Gregory of Tours, *Gloria Confessorum*, 26. The most distinguished desert fathers denied women access to the space around their cells, pillars, or caves. John of Lycopolis only blesses men through the window of his tiny cell. He speaks to women disciples in dreams (Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, 1.7).

93. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 2.12.

94. Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, 26, PL 32.55.

95. Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 2.1; 4.36; *Gloria Confessorum*, 31, 74, 75, 77.

96. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 3.

97. For a discussion of the *chlamys*, see Mayo, *History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, 14, 20–21; Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 180, 250–52; Ann M. Stout, “Jewelry as a Symbol of Status in the Roman Empire,” in *World of Roman Costume*, ed. Sebesta and Bonfante, 83–84; and Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 101.

98. Vulgate reads “chlamydem coccineam circumdederunt ei.” After the crucifixion, the Roman soldiers divided up Jesus’ garments and cast lots for them (see Psalm 22.18: “They divide my clothing among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots”).

99. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 2.3.

100. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 10.

101. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 1.23.

102. Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 19.
103. See Goldman, "Reconstructing Roman Clothing," in *World of Roman Costume*, ed. Sebesta and Bonfante, 231–32.
104. Constantius, *Vita Germani*, 4.
105. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri II*, 1.17.
106. Gregory the Great, *Dialogorum libri IV*, 2.1.
107. *Vita S. Martini*, 10; *Vita Hilarii Arelatensis*, 8.
108. "Is constitutus in ecclesia, tractante episcopo, vidit, ut ipse postmodum loquebatur, angelum ad aures episcopi tractantis loquentem ut verba angeli populo episcopus renuntiare videretur": Paulinus, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, 17 (Kaniecka, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, 56). The hagiographical physiognomy of holy men is as vague as that of Christ. Ambrose's hagiographer describes the bishop as the transfigured Christ whose face reveals the Holy Spirit. The vague descriptions of Christian saints invert the complex physiognomical treatments of classical emperors and public men.
109. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 12.3; and *Gloria Confessorum*, 20 and 38. See also Giselle de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), chap. 3.
110. "Cappa autem huius indumenti ita dilatata erat atque consuta, ut solent in illis candidis fieri, quae per paschalia festa sacerdotum umeris inponuntur": Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 8.5 (MGH SRM 1.2.246). Gregory describes this particular cape as the kind reserved for Easter celebrations because it was decorated with linen bands in memory of Christ's resurrection.
111. "palleolis vel reliqua ministerii ornamenta": Gregory of Tours, *In Gloria Martyrum*, 65 (MGH SRM 1.2.82).
112. Paraphrase of Georges Duby, *William Marshal: The Flower of Chivalry*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 15. Duby uses the motif of changed dress to symbolize William Marshal's conversion to the ascetic life of a Templar.
113. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 10–11.
114. Geary, *Before France and Germany*, 134.

Chapter 4

1. See also Mark 1.12–13 and Luke 4.1–13.
2. Parallel texts in Mark 1.1–8; Luke 3.1–18; and John 1.6–8, 19–28.
3. The desert corpus exists in a variety of manuscript forms and languages, including Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Ethiopic, Old Sogdian, Armenian, Greek, and Latin, and its popularity in the West is attested by the number of extant copies housed in early medieval monastic *scriptoria*. E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Paleographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), cites over twenty extant manuscripts and fragments of the desert corpus produced in monastic *scriptoria* in France, Italy, Rhaetia, Switzerland, Germany, and Spain. For the textual traditions of the desert corpus, see Gould, *Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 1–25; Rousselle, *Porneia*, 138–40; and Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics and Authority in the Ages of Jerome and Cassian*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). For the translation of Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, see Norman Russell, trans., *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, Cistercian Studies Series 34 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980); for Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa* = *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, see R. M. Price, trans., *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: A History of the Monks of Syria*, Cistercian Studies Series 88 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1985); for the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Cistercian Studies Series 59 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1975); for Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, see Robert T. Meyer, trans., *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, Ancient Christian Writers Series 34 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1965); and, for Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vita Antonii*, see Robert C. Gregg, trans., *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

4. See Brown, *Body and Society*, chap. 11.
5. Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, 7.2; translation from Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 69.
6. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 2.2.
7. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 18.4.
8. Goubâ (pit); Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 13.2; Price, *Monks of Syria*, 101.
9. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 1.
10. In Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *Historia Religiosa* (6.10–11), a Syrian holy man tames wild lions and wild crows feed him.
11. A. J. Festugière, *Les moines d'orient* 4(1) (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 19, note to line 242, says that self-immurement in tombs (*necrotaphioi*) had already been part of a pre-Christian Egyptian religious practice.
12. *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Ammonas, 30; translation from Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 25.
13. *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Antony, 27.
14. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 48.3.
15. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 43.1.
16. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 11.4, 18.4, 42; Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, 13.7.
17. *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Arsenius, 42.
18. Russell (*Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 132 n. 1, under IX Amoun) notes that "large serpent" (*megalon drakontos*) was another way of saying the devil.
19. Rufinus, *Historia Monachorum*, 9.1; translation from Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 80.
20. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 27.1; translation from Price, *Monks of Syria*, 177.
21. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, Prologue, 9; translation from Price, *Monks of Syria*, 7.
22. For a discussion of women as salvific forces in human history, see Harvey, "Women in Byzantine Hagiography," 36–59. This article greatly influenced the following discussion.
23. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 5.1; translation from Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, 36.

24. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 5.2; translation from Meyer, *Lausiak History*, 36–37.
25. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, 10; translation from Gregg, *Life of Antony*, 39.
26. Gregg discusses the *aktina phōtos* (saving light) in *Life of Antony*, 136 n. 24.
27. For the entire episode, see Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, 8–11.
28. Theodoret of Cyrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 27.3.
29. See Harvey, “Women in Byzantine Hagiography,” 42.
30. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 31, 60, and 67.
31. Theodoret of Cyrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 29–30.
32. The phrase “icon of repentance” is from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 26.
33. For the textual tradition, see Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, eds., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 40–41, 186–87; and Pierre Petitmengin, *Pélagie la Pénitente*. Brock and Harvey (41–62) translate the Syriac version which is based on the Greek life; and Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 66–75, translates the Latin text. See Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 2–3, for a discussion of the historical value of the *vita*. Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 193–94, discusses Pelagia’s *vita*. Subsequent references are to the Latin *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, PL 73.663–72.
34. For example, an eighth- or ninth-century edition of the Latin *vita* found at Chartres fuses Pelagia’s *vita* with the *Life of Melania the Younger*; see Elizabeth A. Clark, trans., *The Life of Melania the Younger*, Studies in Women and Religion 14 (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 3, 178 n. 24.
35. See Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 2.231.
36. In *Apophthegmata Patrum*, John the Dwarf, 16, an elderly hermit informs Abba John that, “you are like a courtesan who shows her beauty to increase the number of her lovers.” See Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 60.
37. Brock and Harvey (*Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 40) note that some historians have mistakenly identified the legendary Nonnus as a fifth-century Bishop of Edessa.
38. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 2.
39. “Ecce subito transiit per nos prima mimarum Antiochiaie; ipsaque est prima choreutiarum pantomimarum, sedens super asellum; et processit cum summa phantasia, adornata ita, ut nihil videretur super ea nisi aurum et margaritae et lapides pretiosi; nuditas vero pedum eius ex auro et margaritis erat cooperta . . .”: *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 2, PL 73.664.
40. The Latin *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis* (1) claims that the bishops hid their faces in their scapulas, or tabards worn over habits (see Mayo, *History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, 171). In the Syriac *vita* (6), the bishops merely avert their eyes.
41. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 3.
42. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 3. In the Syriac *vita* (8), Nonnus beats his chest and soaks his hair shirt with tears.
43. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 3; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 68.
44. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 4.
45. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 4; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 68.
46. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 9. Christianity provided the avenue through

which actresses could legitimately abandon their profession. The Theodosian Code dictates that “actresses were not allowed to leave their profession unless they converted to Christianity.” See *Theodosiani Libri XVI*, 15.7; cited by Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 29–30. For a discussion of the female diaconate, see Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 205–11.

47. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 11.

48. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 12. In the Syriac version (*vita*, 41), Nonnus gives Pelagia his *chiton*. In the gospel of John (19.23), Jesus wears a seamless shirt or *chiton*.

49. The hagiographer describes the shrine as “in modica cellula undique circumclusa, et parvam fenestellam habuerat in pariete”; *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 14, PL 73.670.

50. James claims that he could not have recognized the former prostitute: “Quomodo enim poteram cognoscere illam, quam antea videram inaestimabili pulchritudine, iam facie marcidam factam prae nimia abstinentia? Oculi vero eius sicut fossae videbantur”: *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 14, PL 73.670.

51. “Sanctum corpusculum”: *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 15, PL 73.670.

52. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 15. Reference to Matthew 6.19–20.

53. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 15; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 74–75.

54. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 14; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 74.

55. See Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 129; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 290–91; Salisbury, *Church Fathers and Independent Virgins*, 109–10; Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 63; Patlagean, “L’Histoire de la femme déguisée en moine,” 597–623; Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism,” 1–32; and Garber, *Vested Interests*, 213–17.

56. Salisbury, *Church Fathers and Independent Virgins*, 110.

57. *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 40, in *New Testament Apocrypha* 2, ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, trans. R. Mcl. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965). The Greco-Roman romantic *topos* is discussed by Clark, *Women in Antiquity*, 31.

58. For a detailed history of the Christian exegesis on the Song of Songs, see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

59. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 4.

60. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 7.

61. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 7; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 70.

62. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 8.

63. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 14.

64. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 2; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 67.

65. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 8; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 71.

66. Tertullian, *De habitu muliebri*, 1.2.

67. *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis*, 11.

68. Discussed by Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 63.

69. Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, PL 23.17–60. For the textual traditions of the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, see Paul Harvey's forthcoming article, "Mary the Egyptian: Sources and Purpose," 25 mss pages (I should like to thank Professor Harvey for sharing his essay with me). Dembowski, *La Vie de Sainte Marie l'Egyptienne*, 21–22; and Salisbury, *Church Fathers and Independent Virgins*, 69. Albert Siegmund (*Die Überlieferung der griechischen christlichen Literatur in der lateinischen Kirche bis zum zwölften Jahrhundert* [Munich-Pasing: Filser-Verlag, 1949], 269) discusses the Latin translation from the Greek by Paulus Diaconus Neapolitanus, whose prologue to the *vita* is dated c. 876–877. In the prologue, Paulus states that he prepared a translation of Mary of Egypt's *vita* much earlier for Charles the Bald. Subsequent references are to Paulus Diaconus's Latin translation, *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, PL 73.671–90. Sophronius's text is in PG 87(3).3693–726.

70. For example, in Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 34.6, an angel instructs Abba Piteroum to journey to the women's community at Tabennisi to witness the humility of a spiritual mother who resided there. At Tabennisi, Piteroum visits with each of the sisters, but finds no saint among them. Finally, he asks to see the mad woman of the community, who binds her head in rags, eats crumbs, and joyously performs the most vile tasks. When the female lunatic comes before him, the abba falls down at her feet exclaiming: "Bless me!" The nuns are shocked by the holy man's obsequious behavior, and they caution him not to embrace the insane woman. "You are the ones who are touched!" he replies "This woman is a spiritual mother"; translation from Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, 98.

71. Harvey, "Mary the Egyptian: Sources and Purpose," 6.

72. Discussed in McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, 241ff.

73. Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 1.227–29.

74. Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 166–95; and Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 157–211.

75. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 22; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 53.

76. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 19; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 50.

77. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 7; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 41.

78. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 4; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 39.

79. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 10; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 42.

80. Theodoret of Cyrrihus (*Historia Religiosa*, 6.7–8) asserts that Abba Symeon the Elder had to convince two pilgrims that he was a man and not a demon.

81. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 11; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 44.

82. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 12.

83. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 15; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 46.

84. Paul Havery (“Mary the Egyptian: Sources and Purposes, 6–7) discusses how iconophiles used Mary’s conversion by an icon of the *Theotokos* during the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century.

85. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 16; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 47.

86. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 19; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 50.

87. See also Exodus 15.24, where the unfaithful Israelites ask Moses, “What shall we drink?”

88. Discussed by Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 215–16.

89. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 24–25; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 54.

90. *Vita S. Mariae Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 20.

91. For the work of Francesco Traini, see Millard Meiss, “The Problem of Francesco Traini,” *Art Bulletin* 15 (1933): 97–173. Later medieval depictions of Mary of Egypt show the holy woman with long hair. This may be due to the fact that Mary’s *vita* had become closely associated with that of Mary Magdalene, who was portrayed with flowing tresses.

92. Miles (*Carnal Knowing*, 142–44) argues that the female nude was too erotic to illustrate spiritual strength but that the male nude personified commitment, extraordinary spiritual vitality, physical control, and order. Mary of Egypt’s nudity (mentioned by Miles, 64) clearly depicts the female body as having obliterated sensuality. On Christian nudity, see also Brown, *Body and Society*, 313–17. Salisbury (*Church Fathers and Independent Virgins*, 70) argues that this ex-prostitute’s rejection of the clothing of a harlot would have been scandalous in Roman society, which was governed by strict codes of dress according to occupation.

93. In the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the harlot figure represents urban civilization, while in the Pentateuch and books of the prophets harlots signify sinful Israel. For a discussion of the harlot-saint *topos*, see Ruth Mazo Karras, “Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990): 3–32.

94. Edith Wyschogrod (*Saints and Postmodernism*, 13) argues that the *imitatio Christi* is “an unrealizable imperative” because Christ’s perfection cannot be duplicated by humans. Paul’s *vita* operates similarly as an unrealizable imperative.

95. Vulgate reads “Nigra sum, sed formosa. . . . Nolite me considerare quod fusca sim, quia decoloravit me sol.”

96. Vulgate reads “caput autem eius, et capilli erant candidi tanquam lana alba, et tanquam nix.”

97. Origen (185–254 CE) in his exegesis on the Song of Songs, interprets the *nigra sum sed formosa* text as an allegory of the pristine church. See Origen, *The Song of Songs*, 2.1. English translation by R. P. Lawson, *Origen: The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, Ancient Christian Writers Series 26 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1957), 91–92. Origen extols the beauty of the Bride of Christ, or the Church, who is “dark and beautiful, O Ye Daughters of Jerusalem.” She is the mirror opposite of the indulgent daughters of earthly Jerusalem, who find her ugly and “despise and vilify her for her ignoble birth; for she is baseborn in their eyes.”

Chapter 5

1. Eusebius of Caesaria, *Vita Constantini*, 3.47, PG 20.1105–8. English translation by E. C. Richardson, “The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine,” in *Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1961), 481–559. An Italian translation is by Luigi Tartaglia, *Eusebio di Cesarea Sulla Vita Di Costantino* (Naples: M. D’Auria, 1984). Tartaglia (147 n. 110–11) discusses the title Augusta and the coins minted in her honor. Borgehammar (*How the Holy Cross Was Found*) details the development of the Helena legend. See also Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 32–33.

2. Brown (*Body and Society*, 146) notes the usurpation of clerical roles by ambitious women: “Some women, however, edged closer to the clergy: continence or widowhood set them free from the disqualifications associated with sexual activity.”

3. See Salisbury, *Church Fathers and Independent Virgins*, 89–96; Elizabeth A. Clark, “Early Christian Women: Sources and Interpretations,” in *That Gentle Strength*, ed. Coon et al., 29; Brown, *Body and Society*, 344–45; Rosemary Ruether, “Mothers of the Church: Ascetic Women in the Late Patristic Age,” in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 88–94; Jo Ann McNamara, “Muffled Voices: The Lives of Consecrated Women in the Fourth Century,” in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 11–29; and Jill Harries, “‘Treasure in Heaven’: Property and Inheritance Among Senators of Late Rome,” in *Marriage and Property*, ed. Elizabeth M. Craik (St. Andrews: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), 54–70. See Cloke (*This Female Man of God*, chaps. 6–7) for the social implications of “Christian motherhood.”

4. See Peter Brown, “Church and Leadership,” in *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Paul Veyne, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 279.

5. Holum (*Theodosian Empresses*, 29–30) emphasizes that women could not hold office or be in the Senate nor could they wear the senatorial toga and emblems of office. See also Theodosius, *Theodosiana Libri XVI*, 6.4.17.

6. See Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 24.

7. See Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, and Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, chap. 7.

8. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 72. See also E. D. Hunt, “Hadrian and Helena,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 67.

9. On the conversion of imperial ideology to Christian doctrine, see Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 24ff. He focuses on the transformation of the classical virtues of *eusebia*, *tapeinophrosyne*, *philanthropia*, and *philandria*. Elm (*Virgins of God*, 99ff) analyzes the eastern *vitae* of patrician women.

10. On Eusebius’s comparison of Constantine and Helena to Christ and Mary, see P. W. L. Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 188.

11. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 1.28ff.
12. See Robert A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 48–50. Markus notes that Eusebius “applies messianic categories to the rule of the Roman Emperors” and that Constantine’s reign represented a “culmination of God’s marvellous saving work” (49). See also Mathews, *Clash of the Gods*, 14ff, and Anthony Kemp (*The Estrangement of the Past: A Study in the Origins of Modern Historical Consciousness* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 17) for Constantine as a “divine deliverer.”
13. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.10.
14. See Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 24; and Ernest Hello, *Physiognomies des Saints* (Paris: Librairie Académique Didier, 1900), 258.
15. See Robert L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian Literature and Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 98. For a detailed discussion of the post-Eusebian legends of the *inventio crucis*, see Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).
16. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.33.
17. See Hunt, “Hadrian and St. Helena,” 67. See also Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 184–85, for the Empress Eudocia’s pilgrimage to Palestine in 438 CE.
18. Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found*, 1. The feast day for the *inventio crucis* is May 3rd.
19. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.42.
20. Cyril, *Catecheses*, PG 33.830; Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, 41–51, CSEL 73(7).393–398; Paulinus of Nola, *Epistle*, 31, CSEL 29(1).267ff; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, PG 67.9–842; and Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, PG 67.843–1630.
21. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.41–47. See discussion by Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 88ff.
22. See Walker (*Holy City, Holy Places*, 14ff) for a discussion of the impact of the conversion of Constantine on the physical landscape of Palestine. Walker maintains that by the mid-fourth century, the major named places of Christ’s life had been identified and had become pilgrimage sites.
23. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.43.
24. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.44.
25. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.44. Eusebius provides a long list of titles (*Vita*, 3.43, PG 20.1103): “Helena Augusta, religiosi imperatoris mater religiosissima, pia devotionis.”
26. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.46–47.
27. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 51; and Hunt, “Hadrian and St. Helena,” 75ff. For a discussion of the political travels of the imperial family, see Helmut Halfmann, *Itinera principum: Geschichte und Typologie der Kaiserreisen im Römischen Reich* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986).
28. Hunt, “Hadrian and St. Helena,” 76.
29. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.47.
30. Borgehammar (*How the Holy Cross Was Found*, chaps. 2–3) reconstructs the “Jerusalem tradition” surrounding the events connected with the Constanti-

nian refashioning of the Holy Land. Drijvers (*Helena Augusta*, 95ff) also discusses the earlier work of Gelasius of Jerusalem (*Church History* [c. 390]), which Drijvers argues is the oldest account of Helena's discovery of the true cross.

31. For a detailed discussion of Cyril's contribution to Holy Land pilgrimage, see Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places*; see also Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 119–20.

32. Cyril, *Catecheses*, 4.10, 10.19, 13.4.

33. Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, 41–51 (CSEL 73[7].393–398). Borgehammar (*How the Holy Cross Was Found*, 60) gives the date of the public reading of the *oratio* as February 25, 395.

34. Borgehammar (*How the Holy Cross Was Found*, 60–66) details Ambrose's version of the legend. He notes that the Theodosian court treasured the image of Helena and that Theodosius's wife, Aelia Flaccilla, was the first empress after Helena to receive the title Augusta.

35. Author's translation of “Illa quasi sancta dominum gestavit, ego crucem eius investigabo. Illa generatum docuit, ego resuscitatum. Illa fecit, ut deus inter homines videretur, ego ad nostorum remedium peccatorum divinum de ruinis elevabo vexillum”: Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, 44 (CSEL 72[7].394).

36. Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, 46.

37. Author's translation of “Visitata est Maria, ut Evam liberaret: visitata est Helena, ut redimerentur imperatores”: Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, 47 (CSEL 73[7].396).

38. Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii oratio*, 48.

39. Melania gave Paulinus a “partem particulae de ligno divinae crucis”: Paulinus, *Epistle*, 31.1 (CSEL 29[1].268). English translation by P. G. Walsh, *The Letters of Paulinus of Nola*, Ancient Christian Writers 36 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1967), 2.125–33. Borgehammar (*How the Holy Cross Was Found*, 66–71) discusses Paulinus's *Epistle* 31, noting that Melania the Elder may have been the major source for his rendition of the legend.

40. Author's translation of “Qui princeps esse principibus Christianis non magis sua quam matris Helenae fide meruit”: Paulinus, *Epistle*, 31.4 (CSEL 29[1].271).

41. Paulinus, *Epistle*, 31.5.

42. Socrates, a Constantinopolitan lawyer, extended Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, and Sozomen elaborated on the work of Socrates. The *vita* of Helena is in Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.17, and Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 2.1–2. English translation of Socrates is by A. C. Zenos, *Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.2.1–178; English translation of Sozomen is by C. D. Hartrauft, *Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.2.179–427.

43. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.17.

44. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 2.2.

45. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, 25–26.

46. See Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 172.

47. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108. Latin text in CSEL 55(2).306–51. English translation in *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Ross S. Kraemer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 127–68.

48. For a discussion of Jerome's *epitaphium* and his relationship with Paula,

see J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 273–82; Martin Heinzelmann (“Neue Aspekte der biographischen und hagiographischen Literatur,” 27–44) discusses the relationship between Christian hagiography and the classical *laudatio funebris*.

49. Author’s translation of “Quis inopum moriens non illius vestibus obvolutus est”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.5 (CSEL 55[2].310).

50. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.5.

51. For example, Helena, Egeria, Melania the Elder, and Poememia.

52. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.7. The Roman historian Dio Cassius (*Histories* 67.14) claims that Domitilla was banished to Pandateria after having been accused of atheism and Judaism. Leclercq (*Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 4[2], 1401–04) notes that Domitilla was the granddaughter of the emperor Vespasian and that she had married Domitian’s cousin, Titus Flavius Clemens.

53. “Longum martyrium duxerat”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.7 (CSEL 55[2].312).

54. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.7.

55. “Asello sedens profecta est”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.7 (CSEL 55[2].312).

56. For Paula’s tour of the Holy Land, see Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.9–13.

57. “prostataque ante crucem, quasi pendentem dominum cerneret, adorabat”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.9 (CSEL 55[2].315).

58. “Ingressa sepulchrum resurrectionis osculabatur lapidem, quem ab ostio sepulchri amoverat angelus, et ipsum corporis locum, in quo dominus iacuerat, quasi sitiens desideratas aquas fide, ore lambebat”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.9 (CSEL 55[2].315).

59. See Gary Vikan, “Pilgrims in Magis’ Clothing” in *Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Ousterhout, 97–107; and Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 151.

60. Vikan (“Pilgrims in Magis’ Clothing,” 100) describes the Holy Sepulcher as a “living icon of the resurrection.”

61. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.14.

62. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.28.

63. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.29.

64. Here Jerome echoes his earlier depiction of Flavia Domitilla’s long martyrdom at Pontia: “mater tua longo martyrio coronata est” (*Epistle*, 108.31, CSEL 55[2].349).

65. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.33.

66. There has been a recent explosion of literature on Roman women. For detailed bibliographies, see Peter Garnsey and R. P. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 126–47; Beryl Rawson, *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986); Beryl Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Veyne, ed., *A History of Private Life*; and Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London: Croom Helm, 1988). For Christian motherhood, see Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, chap. 7.

67. “Laudo nuptias, laudo coniugium, sed quia mihi virgines generant”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 22.20 (CSEL 54.170).

68. Author’s translation of “Romae praetulit Bethlem et auro tecta fulgentia informis luti vilitate mutavit”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.1 (CSEL 55[2].306).

69. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.28.
70. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.9.
71. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.4, 31.
72. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.26.
73. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.10.
74. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.6.
75. According to Dixon (*Roman Mother*, 65–66), “convention insisted that the bond between mother and child was a fundamental one which had little to do with legal technicalities such as agnatic vs. cognate relationship. The dissolution of the marriage between parents did not exonerate mothers of the duty to provide for the children of that marriage from their own estates.” See also her chap. 3, “The Maternal Relationship and Roman Law,” 41–47. Dixon notes (42) that Roman women were under no legal obligation to leave their estates to their children.
76. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.5, 15, 30.
77. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.16–17. Roman satirists ridiculed women who squandered familial wealth. See Veyne, ed., *History of Private Life*, 75.
78. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.15.
79. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.9.
80. “Omnis inopum multitudo matrem et nutricium se perdidisse clamabant”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.29 (CSEL 55[2].348)
81. For other Roman women’s funeral eulogies, see Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome*.
82. Author’s translation of “Cuncta largita est exheredans se in terra, ut hereditatem inveniret in caelo”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.6 (CSEL 55[2].312).
83. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.20.
84. Author’s translation of “Viduae et pauperes in exemplum Dorcadis vestes ab ea praebitas ostendebant”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.29 (CSEL 55[2].348)
85. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.27.
86. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.23–26.
87. Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.15.
88. “Ossibus mortuorum”: Jerome, *Epistle*, 108.17 (CSEL 55[2].328).
89. Dixon, *Roman Mother*, 222.
90. Roman funerary inscriptions contain similar descriptions of the ideal matron. The funeral eulogy for the first-century BCE matron Murdia, for example, praises her modesty, propriety, chastity, obedience, woolworking, industry, and honor; see Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome*, 139.
91. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 1.57–59, in *Titi Livi ab Urbe Condita*, ed. McDonald, 1.57–59. Augustine (*De civitate Dei*, 1.19) refutes Livy’s presentation of Lucretia as the ideal matron because she committed suicide.
92. For the Greek text of the *vita* with a French translation (Denys Gorce, *Vie de Sainte Mélanie*), see SC 90. For both the Greek and Latin texts of the life and an Italian translation of the Greek *vita*, see Mariano del Tindaro Rampolla, ed. and trans., *Vita Melaniae Junioris. Santa Melania giuniore, senatrice romana: documenti contemporanei e note* (Rome: Tipografia Vaticana, 1905). For the English translation, see Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*. Clark disagrees with Rampolla, who argues that the Greek text is the earlier of the two. Clark discusses the genre of

the *vita* (153–70) and provides an extensive discussion of the Greek and Latin texts and the manuscript traditions (1–24). There exists an eighth- or ninth-century manuscript of Melania's *vita* that intersperses the Roman matron's sacred biography with that of the harlot-saint, Pelagia (see Clark, 3, 178 n. 24). Subsequent citations, unless otherwise noted, are to Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, SC 90.

93. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 46, 54. Clark (*Life of Melania the Younger*, 83–92) provides a detailed examination of Melania's family: Melania the Elder was a member of the *gens Antonia*; Melania the Younger's mother, Albina, was of the *Ceionii Rufii* clan; and Melania's husband, Pinian, belonged to the *Valerii*. The elder Melania established two monasteries in Jerusalem between 378 and 380 (Clark, 116).

94. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, Prologue.

95. Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 85.

96. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 5.

97. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 6. Elliott (*Spiritual Marriage*, 55–56) discusses Melania and Pinian's sexual renunciation.

98. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 8.

99. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 9.

100. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 10. As Clark notes (*Life of Melania the Younger*, 100–101), Severus was probably within his legal right to attempt to control the couple's finances because they were both still minors.

101. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 11. Serena was the wife of Stilicho and mother-in-law of the Emperor Honorius; see Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 101–2.

102. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 12.

103. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 15–17.

104. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 18. Clark (*Life of Melania the Younger*, 190 n. 24.) notes that the Latin life supplements this lavish description by claiming that the estate supported four hundred agricultural slaves. Clark also believes that this particular property could be the couple's Sicilian or Campanian estate (99).

105. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 18.

106. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 19.

107. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 19.

108. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 20. Augustine addresses several letters to Melania, Pinian, and Albina; see *Epistles*, 124, 125, and 126, CSEL 44(2/3).1–18.

109. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 21–22.

110. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 22–24.

111. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 32. The Syrian Father, Baradatus, similarly constructed a small wooden prayer chest; see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 27.2.

112. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 29, 32.

113. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 35.

114. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 35. Gorce (*Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, 194 n. 1) notes that all of the churches kept poor registries and categorized different levels of poverty.

115. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 37. Gorce (*Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, 197 n.4) says that the liquidation of Melania's property in Spain occurred after the Roman restoration of the province, c. 419.

116. "Hos andra": Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 39, SC 90.198.

117. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 40. Melania's cousin was the daughter of Laeta who had married Toxotius, the son of Paula and Toxotius. Jerome wrote his *Epistle* 107 to Laeta on the subject of "little Paula's" Christian education. See Gorce, *Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, 204 n.1; and Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 243 n. 72.

118. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 40.

119. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 41.

120. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 41–47.

121. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 48.

122. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 49.

123. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 50–55. Clark (*Life of Melania the Younger*, 129) and Gorce (*Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, 224–25 n. 1) detail Volusian's biography. See also Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 183.

124. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 52. Gorce (*Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, 227 n. 3) discusses this rather unusual "miracle" and cites the *Theodosiana Libri XVI*, 8.5.1.4, for the legal technicality involved.

125. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 59–61.

126. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 54–57. See Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 184.

127. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 58.

128. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 63.

129. For the date of Melania's death, see Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 140.

130. "Andra prophetikon charisma": Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 34, SC 90.190.

131. Clark (*Women in Late Antiquity*, 115–16) discusses Melania's ascetic clothing.

132. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 69. See also Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 116.

133. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 11.

134. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 31.

135. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 62.

136. Hunt (*Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 138) states that the 120,000 solidi is the equivalent of approximately 1,700 pounds of gold. The Greek text of the life says that the 120,000 gold coins was Pinian's income, but the Latin text claims it belonged to Melania (see Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 95). Clark (96) also points out that the wealthiest senators possessed incomes of approximately 4,000 pounds of gold. Hunt notes that Melania's liquidation of her estates in the West was "carried out in the 'teeth' of the Gothic raids" (139) with the calculated purpose of preventing them from falling into Alaric's hands. The correspondences between Augustine of Hippo and Melania, Pinian, and Albina suggest that the Roman saints chose to leave North Africa not on account of spiritual reasons but because of the threat of a Vandal incursion; see Augustine, *Epistle*, 126. Augustine suggests that it

was Pinian who worried about the Vandal menace, and that when Melania interjected that it was also the climate that made them want to abandon Thagaste, Pinian silenced her.

137. Brown (*Cult of the Saints*, 34–35) discusses the “privatization” of the holy in late antique North Africa. Cloke (*This Female Man of God*, 173) notes late Roman aristocratic women privately control the church in a manner reminiscent of the later medieval practice of *Eigenkirchen*, or lay dynastic control of church property.

138. Clark (*Life of Melania the Younger*, 189 n. 6) notes that the Latin version of the *vita* adds that Melania bribed her father’s eunuchs not to report that she spent the entire night in prayer while she was pregnant.

139. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 52.

140. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 17. Augustine (*De sancta virginitate*, 9, PL 40.400) warns wealthy women that riches do not guarantee salvation: “Quid enim si aliqua mulier dives multam pecuniam huic bono operi impendat, ut emat ex diversis gentibus servos quos faciat christianos; nonne uberius atque numerosius quam uteri quantalibet feracitate Christi membra gignenda curabit? Nec ideo tamen pecuniam suam comparare muneri sacrae virginitatis audebit.” Peter Brown has argued that the male ecclesiastical hierarchy’s reliance on the financial support of patrician women such as Melania was simultaneously imperative and embarrassing; see Brown, “Church and Leadership,” in *History of Private Life*, ed. Veeyne, 279.

141. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 38. Palladius’s *Historia Lausiaca* (58.2) also contains an instance where Melania tries to give five hundred gold coins to the hermit Dorotheus.

142. Gerontius, *Vita S. Melaniae Iunioris*, 38, SC 90.198. Clark (*Life of Melania the Younger*, 53) translates this as a “spiritual ruse.” Gorce (*Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, 199) translates the Greek as “un subterfuge tout spirituel.” Cloke (*This Female Man of God*, 178) discusses this unusual passage.

143. Brown argues that women remained marginal figures within the eastern ascetic experience because “the life of the ‘brides of Christ’ always lay a little to the one side of the great myth of the desert that had given new meaning to male asceticism in Egypt and elsewhere” (*Body and Society*, 262).

144. For example, in Palladius’s *Historia Lausiaca* (35.14–15), a wealthy woman, Poimenia, visited Abba John of Lycopolis. The great abba warned her not to travel to Alexandria, but she ignored his advice and continued on to the metropolis. When her entourage landed at Alexandria, they were attacked by thieves who “cut off the finger of a eunuch; another one they killed; not recognizing the saintly bishop Dionysius, they doused him in the river. After they had wounded all the other servants, they insulted and threatened Poimenia”; translation from Russell, *Lausiak History*, 103.

Chapter 6

1. See Proverbs 31.10–31; 1 Kings 17.8–13; 2 Kings 4.8–10; Mark 1.30–31; Matthew 8.14–15; Luke 4.38–39; Acts 9.36–41, 16.14–15.

2. Author's translation of "Languidis autem et caecis non cessabat ipsa cibos cum cocleare porrigere, hoc praesentibus duabus, sed se sola serviente, ut nova Martha satageret donec potulenti fratres laeti fierent conviviis": Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 17 (MGH SRM 2.370).

3. For an overview of Merovingian hagiography, see Paul Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," *Past and Present* 127 (1990): 3–38. Fouracre asserts that the Merovingian period produced more saints' lives "than in any other comparable period in the post-Constantinian church" (9). See Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger*; Jo Ann McNamara, "A Legacy of Miracles: Hagiography and Nunneries in Merovingian Gaul," in *Women of the Medieval World*, ed. Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 36–52; Friedrich Prinz, *Askese und Kultur: vor- und frühbenediktinisches Mönchtum an der Wiege Europas* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1980), 75–86; and Heinzelmann, "Neue Aspekte der biographischen und hagiographischen Literatur," 27–44.

4. Wemple (*Women in Frankish Society*, 28) argues that Frankish legal, narrative, and archaeological sources all point to the domestication of women's sanctity in the West.

5. See Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 47. For monasticism in early Francia, see Friedrich Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1965), particularly 19–117; Eugen Ewig, *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1988); Eugen Ewig, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien*, 2 vols. (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1976–1979); Joachim Werner and Eugen Ewig, *Von der Spätantike zum Frühen Mittelalter: Aktuelle Probleme in historischer und archäologischer Sicht* (Sigmarigen: Jan Thorbecke, 1979); Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London: Longman, 1994), 181–202; and Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*.

6. See Fouracre, "Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography," 3–4, 9, 10; and Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 1, for a discussion of the terms, "Merovingian," "Francia," and "Gaul." See also Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, 489–93.

7. Such Gallo-Roman aristocrats included Honoratus of Arles, John Cassian, and Victor of Marseilles; see Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 22ff.

8. Marmoutier is located approximately two miles from Tours. Martin lived in this "Gallic desert" with eighty disciples. Ligugé is approximately five miles from Poitiers. See Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 7, 10. For a discussion of the geographic sites connected with the *Life of Martin*, see Sharon Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), chap. 1.

9. For the history of women's monasticism in France, see Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

10. Geary (*Before France and Germany*, 43) cites the women associated with Caesarius's rule. For a detailed discussion of the rule, see Vogüé, "La Règle de Césaire d'Arles pour les moines," 369–406. For a discussion of the social and economic aspects of the *regula*, see Jo Ann McNamara, "A Legacy of Miracles," 40. For a general discussion of the women's rule, see Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles*, 117–

24; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 182; Donald Hochstetler, “The Meaning of Monastic Cloister for Women According to Caesarius of Arles,” in *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and John J. Contreni (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), 27–40; and Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, 76–84.

11. Wemple (*Women in Frankish Society*, 154ff) discusses the origins of women’s monasticism in Gaul; McNamara (“A Legacy of Miracles,” 36–52) examines the social world of the Merovingian convent, as does Jane T. Schulenberg, “Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience, 500–1000,” in *Distant Echoes*, ed. Nichols and Shank, 1.51–86.

12. Janet Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History,” in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 31–78.

13. McNamara, “A Legacy of Miracles,” 40–41.

14. Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 2.43, and *Gloria Confessorum*, 89. See the late ninth- or early tenth-century *vita* of the queen, *Vita S. Chrotildis reginae francorum*. The Carolingians present the queen as the Augusta of Gaul and the mother of the Frankish peoples. For Chlotild’s patronage of the cult of Genovefa, see Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 24.

15. For Chlotild, see Gregory of Tours, *De virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, 7; for Papula, see Gregory of Tours, *Gloria Confessorum*, 16; for Ingtrude, see Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 5.21, 9.33, 10.12; and for Ultragotha, see Gregory of Tours, *De virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, 1.12. See also McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 52–53.

16. Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 30ff. See also McNamara, “A Legacy of Miracles,” 39.

17. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 1.2.211–94. English translation by Edward James, *Gregory of Tours, Lives of the Fathers*, Translated Texts for Historians Latin Series 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1986). Krusch believed that Monegund’s *vita* (*Liber vitae patrum*, 19) was composed prior to 587. Gregory of Tours also included an abbreviated version of Monegund’s life in his *Gloria Confessorum*, 24.

18. Geary (*Before France and Germany*, 124) points out that thirteen out of eighteen bishops of Tours had come from Gregory’s family. Prinz (*Frühes Mönchtum*, 37) discusses the cult of Monegund within the larger context of the spread of the veneration of Saint Martin.

19. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.2.

20. McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 51.

21. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.1.

22. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.1.

23. James (*Lives of the Fathers*, 120 n. 4) states that the basilica at Evena was built by Bishop Perpetuus of Tours (c. 460–490). Médard died c. 557/558.

24. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.2.

25. “Quas vulgo mattas vocant”: Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.2 (MGH SRM 1.2.288). See also Benedict of Nursia, *Regula Sancti Benedictii*, 55.13;

James (*Lives of the Fathers*, 124 n. 9) says that a charter of 1031 records the existence of this small community. After that, all trace of Monegund's establishment disappears, but her relics were transferred to St.-Pierre-le-Puellier.

26. Sulpicius Severus describes the ex-soldier Martin's new spiritual weapons as healing with prayer and oil; see *Vita S. Martini*, 16.

27. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.1; and Constantius of Lyons, *Vita Germani episcopi Autissiodorensis*, 3.

28. Bynum discusses this traditional feminine imagery throughout *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

29. "Ad stabulum medicinae caelestis": Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19, Prologue (MGH SRM 1.2.286).

30. Author's translation of "hauriretque de fonte sacerdotali, quo possit aditum memoris paradisiaci recludere": Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19, Prologue (MGH SRM 1.2.286).

31. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.1.

32. Kelly (*Devil at Baptism*, 111–12) discusses the use of salt and oil in early baptism and exorcism.

33. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.4.

34. Kelly, *Devil at Baptism*, 116–17.

35. See Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 102.

36. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.3; translation from James, *Lives of the Fathers*, 123.

37. "Sanctum Martinum antestitem pastorem magnum": Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.4 (MGH SRM 1.2.289).

38. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.4; translation from James, *Lives of the Fathers*, 124.

39. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19, Prologue.

40. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.4.

41. Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.4.

42. McNamara ("A Legacy of Miracles," 41) discusses Monegund's spiritual transformation from independent ascetic to mother of a community at Tours.

43. For the textual and manuscript tradition, see Bruno Krusch's introduction to Fortunatus's and Baudonivia's *vitae* (MGH SRM 2.358–64). Krusch dates Baudonivia's text between 609 and 614. Gregory of Tours includes Radegund in his hagiographical accounts of Christian confessors in the *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 104. There exists an extensive secondary literature on the life and cult of Radegund of Poitiers. See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 136–39; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 30ff; Isabel Moreira, "Provisatrix optima: St. Radegund of Poitiers' relic petitions to the East," *Journal of Medieval History* 19 (1993): 285–305; Carasco, "Spirituality in Context," 414–35; Cristina Papa, "Radegund e Bathilde: modele di santità regia femminile nel regno merovingia," *Benedictina* 36 (1989): 13–33; Sabine Gäbe, "Radegundis: sancta, regina, ancilla. Zum Heiligkeitideal der Radegundisviten von Fortunat und Baudonivia," *Francia* 16 (1989): 1–30; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 181–85; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 27–28; Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger*, 407–10; Louise Coudanne, "Baudonivie,

moniale de Sainte Croix et sa biographe de sainte Radegond,” *Études mérovingiennes: Actes des Journées de Poitiers* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1953), 45–51; Étienne Delaruelle, “Sainte Radegonde de Poitiers, son type de sainteté et la chrétienté de son temps,” *Études mérovingiennes: Actes des Journées de Poitiers* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1953), 64–74; D. Tardi, *Fortunatus: Étude sur un dernier représentant de la poésie latine dans la Gaule mérovingienne* (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1927); and René Aigrain, *Sainte Radegonde vers 520–587* (Poitiers: Éditions des Cordeliers, 1917).

44. Smith, “Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe,” 13, notes that Fortunatus’s *vita* was one of three that circulated widely in medieval Europe. Radegund’s *cultus* also experienced a “renaissance” in the eleventh century, both in France and in England. For a discussion of the late eleventh-century Poitiers illustrated *vitae* of Radegund see Carrasco, “Spirituality in Context,” and “Sanctity and Experience in Pictorial Hagiography: Two Illustrated Lives of Saints from Romanesque France,” in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Szell, 33–66; as well as Emile Ginot, “Le Manuscrit de sainte Radegonde de Poitiers et ses peintures du onzième siècle,” *Bulletin de la Société Française de Reproductions de Manuscrits à Peintures* 4 (1914–1920): 9–80.

45. For the life of the Italian poet, see Brian Brennan, “The Career of Venantius Fortunatus,” *Traditio* 41 (1985): 49–78. Brennan (78) states that Fortunatus had become bishop of Poitiers by 594. See also Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Prinz (*Frühes Mönchtum*, 485) asserts that Fortunatus’s *Radegundisvita* established a new type of dynastic saint’s life which fused nobility and holiness, and that this model would influence subsequent portrayals of medieval saints.

46. Prinz (*Frühes Mönchtum*, 157–58) discusses Radegund’s contribution to Frankish monasticism.

47. Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 3.4; Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 2.

48. McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley (*Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 71 n. 33) note that Athiès later became part of Radegund’s *Morgengabe*.

49. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 2.

50. “Manu superposita, consecravat diaconam”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 12 (MGH SRM 2.368).

51. Fortunatus neglects to discuss the foundation of the institution of Holy Cross. McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley (*Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 79 n. 66) believe that Fortunatus found the whole affair “too unfavorable to King Chlotar.”

52. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 24.

53. See McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 81 n. 71.

54. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 2. Karen Jo Torjesen, (“Reconstruction of Women’s Early Christian History,” in *Searching the Scriptures*, ed. Schüssler-Fiorenza, 294) discusses architectural and artistic depictions of women ministering the eucharist at the table. See also Dorothy Irvin, “The Ministry of Women in the Early Church: The Archaeological Evidence,” *Duke Theological Review* 2 (1980), 76–86.

55. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 5.

56. The text reads two *sestaria*. McNamara et al. (79 n. 67) say that one *sestarius* is approximately a pint.

57. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 25.

58. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 22. Similarly, Germanus of Auxerre (Constantius, *Vita Germani episcopi Autissiodorensis*, 4) and Monegund (Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, 19.2) slept on ascetic bedding.

59. “Quia non essent persecutionis tempora, a se ut fieret martyra”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 26 (MGH SRM 2.373).

60. Radegund sites in England and Austria are often associated with baths.

61. Kelly (*Devil at Baptism*, 116–17) provides a theological interpretation of each of the rituals: the anointing of the ears means that holiness comes from the word of God; the anointing of the nostrils allows the catechumen to breathe in the Christian life; the anointing of the breast results in a “pure heart”; the naked body of the catechumen signifies the death of the flesh; the three immersions in water symbolize the trinity and the resurrection of Christ on the third day; and the re-clothing of the Christian in white linen parallels the transfiguration of Christ.

62. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 18. Carrasco (“Spirituality in Context,” 424–25) discusses the liturgical images from the Romanesque illustrated life of Radegund.

63. For a discussion of the Germanic *Raubehe*, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 12–14, 33–35.

64. “Tantum ne Christo vilesceret”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 5 (MGH SRM 2.367). Elliott (*Spiritual Marriage*, 41, 66) discusses “the alleged incompatibility of prayer and normal conjugal relationships” as well as the hagiographical motif of married women who heroically attempt to preserve their vows of chastity.

65. See Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 136–43; and McNamara et al., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 75 n. 53.

66. Elliott (*Spiritual Marriage*, 79 n. 108) observes that Médard may have hesitated to consecrate Radegund because repudiation of a spouse was “a male prerogative.”

67. They may have also implied that the independent Radegund was a whore, though the Latin is a bit obscure concerning this point. “Ut praesumeret principi subducere reginam non publicanam, sed publicam”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 12 (MGH SRM 2.368).

68. “De qua regi dicebatur, habere se potius iugalem monacham quam reginam”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 5 (MGH SRM 2.367).

69. “Hoc etiam praemeditans cum Samuele parvulo clerico gerebat”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 2 (MGH SRM 2.365).

70. Domnolenus is referred to as a *tribunus fisci*: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 38 (MGH SRM 2.376).

71. For the detailed accounts of her charitable donations, see Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 13, 14, 17. In fifth-century Ireland, the missionary Patrick returned the jewelry placed on his altar by zealous women in order to protect his reputation as a celibate holy man. “Virginibus Christi et mulieribus religiosis, quae mihi ultronea munuscula donabant et super altare iactabant ex ornamentis suis et iterum reddebam illis et adversus me scandalizabantur cur hoc

faciebam”: Patrick, *Confessio*, 49, *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchú’s Life*, ed. A. B. E. Hood (London: Phillimore, 1978), 32.

72. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 10–11. Radegund’s prayer destroys the chains of the prisoners at Péronne in imitation of Acts (12.7), where an angel miraculously frees the Apostle Peter from prison.

73. “Mutata veste”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 12 (MGH SRM 2.368).

74. “Conposito, sermone ut loquar barbaro, stapione, camisas, manicas, cofias, fibulas, cuncta auro, quaedam gemmis exornata per circulum, sibi profutura sancto tradit altario”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 13 (MGH SRM 2.369). McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley (*Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 76 n. 55) discuss the rather puzzling word *stapione* and conclude that it may be slang for “dressed for stepping out.” For a discussion of the queen’s aristocratic dress, see Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria*, 39; Ewig, *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich*, 79; Lina Eckenstein, *Woman Under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life Between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 54ff; on Merovingian dress in general, see Phyllis Tortora and Keith Eubank, *A Survey of Historic Costume* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1989), 67ff; Edith Ennen, *The Medieval Woman*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 50–51. See Wemple (*Women in Frankish Society*, 47) on the archaeological evidence for Merovingian women’s aristocratic clothing and jewelry.

75. “Mox indumentum nobile, quo celeberrima die solebat, pompa comitante, regina procedere, exuta ponit in altare et blattis, gemmis, ornamentis mensam divinae gloriae tot donis onerat per honorem”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 13 (MGH SRM 2.369).

76. “Ergo casu dum glomus, quem sancta filaverat, perpenderet de camera, veniens sorix, ut tangeret, antequam filum incideret, mortuus in morsu pependit”: Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 30 (MGH SRM 2.374). Meyer Shapiro (“Muscipula Diaboli”: The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece,” *Art Bulletin* 27 (1945): 182–87) points out that a mousetrap is symbolic of the crucifixion. According to Augustine (*Sermon* 263 in PL 38.1210), the cross is a mousetrap for the devil. Radegund therefore may be using her spindle symbolically to “catch the devil.” For the spindle as symbolic of women’s chastity, see Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria*, 1–12. The book of Leviticus (11.29), early medieval church legislation, and hagiographical texts all portrayed mice as unclean. For example, the holy woman Glodesind’s body was defiled by a mouse; see the ninth-century *Vita S. Glodesindae*, 17.

77. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 2.

78. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 19. Fortunatus uses the diminutive form for all the utensils—little knives, little drinking vessels, and little napkins.

79. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 8.

80. Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 17.

81. The female hagiographer notes in her preface that she will focus on those events not covered in the *vita* by the Bishop Fortunatus. “Non ea quae vir apostolicus Fortunatus episcopus de beatae vita conposuit iteramus”: Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, Prologue (MGH SRM 2.378).

82. Brown (*Society and the Holy*, 222–50) details the western episcopacy's arbitration of saintly power through its control of relics and shrines. Baudonivia's Radegund fits Brown's model for a pastoral saint of early medieval Gaul. Eugen Ewig ("Die Merowinger und das Imperium," in *Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften* [Düsseldorf: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1983], 28) discusses Radegund's relationship with the eastern empire vis-à-vis the procurement of the relic of the holy cross.

83. E. Gordon Whatley ("An Early Literary Quotation from the *Inventio S. Crucis*: A Note on Baudonivia's *Vita S. Radegundis* [BHL 7049]," *Analecta Bollandiana* 111 [1993]: 81–91) asserts that Baudonivia's *vita* includes the earliest reference to the *inventio* north of the Alps. He also argues (89) that Baudonivia eliminates the male roles from the original Helena legends and emphasizes the empresses's independent actions.

84. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 1.

85. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 7.

86. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 2. On Martin's destruction of a pagan shrine, see Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 13.

87. Fortunatus writes several poems about Radegund and the wood of the cross. For a discussion of Radegund and Fortunatus's poetry, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, 161–78.

88. "Quod fecit illa in orientali patria, hoc fecit beata Radegundis in Gallia": Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 16 (MGH SRM 2.388).

89. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 16, 23. For a discussion of the conflict between Radegund and Bishop Maroveus, see Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 30–41; and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 138–39.

90. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 18.

91. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 26, 28.

92. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 8.

93. Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II*, 10.

94. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 18, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 2.482–508. For a textual commentary, see Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 97–118. Fouracre and Gerberding believe that the *Vita* (A) was written c. 690.

95. Wood (*Merovingian Kingdoms*, 139) refers to Balthild as "the most influential queen of the seventh century." Fouracre and Gerberding (*Late Merovingian France*, 102) argue that Balthild was probably from a royal Anglo-Saxon background and not a lower-class one as her hagiographer maintains.

96. For discussions of her church reform, see Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 198–202; Eugen Ewig, "Das Privileg des Bischofs Berthefrid von Amiens für Corbie von 664 und die Klosterpolitik der Königin Balthild," *Francia* 1 (1973): 62–114, esp. 106–114, on Balthild's *Klosterpolitik*. See also Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum*, 136–37, 274–75, 293, 520. Prinz believes that Balthild played a direct role in the development of Benedictine-Columbanan monasticism in Merovingian Gaul. Nelson ("Queens as Jezebels," 69) and Ewig (112) argue that Balthild may have been responsible for the acquisition of the famous Martin *capella* for the royal relic collection.

97. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 5.

98. For the *Hausherrschaft* model, see Janet Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 52, 60, 74.

99. See, for example, Stephanus, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi episcopi*, 6 (c. 710). See also Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 139, 199.

100. Balhild’s hagiographer suggests (*Vita S. Balthildis*, 10) that the nuns were not immediately convinced of the validity of Balhild’s ascetic vocation. Nelson (“Queens as Jezebels,” 51–52) believes that Balhild’s forced exile at Chelles corresponded with her son Chlotar’s “coming of age.” She also argues that Balhild’s retirement demonstrates the “precarious position of a queen-mother in seventh-century Francia” (52).

101. Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 46.

102. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 1. For Erchinoald, see McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 269 n. 24; and Horst von Ebling, *Prosopographie der Amtsträger des Merowingerreiches von Chlotar III, 613, bis Karl Martell, 741*, Beiheft der Francia 2 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1974), 137–38.

103. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 3. Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 47.

104. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 4.

105. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 6–9. The cults included those of Saint Denis, Germanus, Médard, Peter, Anianus, and Martin. Nelson (“Queens as Jezebels,” 69) points out that these were almost all of the major cultic sites of seventh-century Gaul.

106. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 10. Bertilla is a saint in her own right; see *Vita Bertillae abbatisae Calensis*, MGH SRM 4.534–46; and McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 280–88. For the date of Balhild’s holy retirement, see Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 51. According to Nelson (69) the abbess and nuns were originally from Jouarre.

107. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 16.

108. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 3; translation from McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 269.

109. See Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 46.

110. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 4.

111. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 4. Ewig (*Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich*, 157) describes Genesius as a “*grand aumônier*.” See also, Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 47.

112. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 8. For the parallel text in the life of Radegund, see Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I*, 13.

113. Her sons are Chlotar III, Childeric, and Theuderic; see *Vita S. Balthildis*, 5. Nelson (“Queens as Jezebels,” 50–51) discusses Balhild as a peacemaker.

114. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 7. See McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 271 n. 34.

115. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 10. For Sigobrand, see McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 273 n. 46; Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 70; and Ewig, *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich*, 159.

116. Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 61–63.

117. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 11; translation from McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 274.

118. *Vita S. Balthildis*, 13.

119. “Ut vera monacha”: *Vita S. Balthildis*, 19 (MGH SRM 2.507).
120. Also discussed by Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 67.
121. See Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 50–51.
122. *Vita S. Chrothildis reginae francorum*, 6; translation from McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, 43. Gregory of Tours (*Decem libri historiarum*, 2.29) also emphasizes Chlotild’s role in the conversion of the Franks. The image of Chlotild as the *mediatrix gratiae* for barbarian tribes is reproduced in other famous early medieval histories, including Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.
123. Stephanus, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi episcopi*, 6; translation from Colgrave, *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 15.
124. Colgrave (*Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 154 note to *Vita*, 6) contends that Balthild may have been present at the execution and, because she was an Anglo-Saxon, she spared Wilfrid’s life. See also Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 201; and Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” 63–66. All three of these sources note that Stephanus confuses the figure of Dalfinus, who was the count of Lyons and brother of the archbishop Aunemundus. Colgrave (*Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, 154) points out that at least one ninth-century manuscript edition of the text names Brunhild (*Brunechild*) as the persecuting queen.
125. William Trent Foley (*Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus’s Life of Bishop Wilfrid, an Early English Saint’s Life* [Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992], 32–33) argues that Stephanus sets up Dalfinus and Wilfrid as father and son to parallel them with Abraham and Isaac. He further believes that Wilfrid’s desire for martyrdom is a hagiographical recreation of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac, and that Wilfrid, like Isaac, is spared so that he can serve as the redeemer of Northumbria, just as Isaac, according to Christian exegesis, is the Hebrew redeemer of Israel. Foley also points out that Balthild’s persecution of the holy Wilfrid foreshadows his later tribulations at the hands of the Northumbrians.
126. Similarly, Procopius of Caesaria’s *Anekdota* vilifies the sixth-century Byzantine empress, Theodora. See Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), chap. 5, “Procopius and Theodora.”
127. The eighth-century life of Balthild’s abbess, Bertilla of Chelles (*Vita Bertillae, abbatissae Calensis*), similarly promotes the cloister and its monastic *regula*. McNamara (“A Legacy of Miracles,” 36–52) discusses the financial realities of women’s communities and the necessity of promoting the posthumous cults of sanctified nuns.
128. “Reliquid sanctum exemplum sequentibus humilitatis et patientiae, mansuetudinis et plenissime dilectionis studium immoque infinitae misericordiae astutaeque prudentiae vigilantiam et confessionem puritatis”: *Vitae S. Balthildis*, 16 (MGH SRM 2.502–503); translation from McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 276. The *vita* Genovefa (*Vita S. Genovefae*, 15) contains the stereotypical virtues of the female saint: faith, abstinence, patience, magnanimity, simplicity, innocence, concord, charity, discipline, chastity, truth, and prudence (see McNamara and Halborg, with Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, 24–25 n. 26). The author of Genovefa’s life claims that these precepts of feminine piety are from the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Book 3, *Similitude*, 9.15.
129. Discussed by Carrasco, “Spirituality in Context,” 414–35.

Conclusion

1. Vulgate reads “Itaque cum recubisset ille supra pectus Iesu, dicit ei: Domine, quis est?” (John 13.25).

2. Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*, 43.

3. David Anderson, translator, *St. John of Damascus, On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack the Divine Images* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 46, 105–6.

4. See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 247.

5. Duane J. Osheim, “The Place of Women in the Late Medieval Italian Church,” in *That Gentle Strength*, ed. Coon, Haldane, and Sommer, 83–84.

6. On separate spheres for women in the nineteenth century, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1 (1975): 1–29.

7. On the role of women in voluntary reform organizations, see Anne Firor Scott, “On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility,” *Journal of American History* 71 (1984): 7–21. For the religious context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century reform, see John M. Mecklin, *The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Cultural Type* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), and Elizabeth Anne Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreier Robins and the Women’s Trade Union League* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 180–84.

8. Louise Roberts, “Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women’s Fashions in 1920s France,” *American Historical Review* 98 (1993): 657–84.

9. *Vita S. Maria Aegyptiacae, Meretricis*, 14; translation from Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, 45.

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